

THE TRAGEDY  
OF  
RAMSAY MACDONALD

*A political biography*

*by*

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TO  
MY WIFE

## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that, at the beginning of MacDonald's career he was animated with a zeal, as strong as it was sincere, to better the lot of his fellows. The extreme poverty of his youth, the hard life in the little cottage, his mother's self-sacrifice and struggle to make ends meet, her hopes and dreams for his future, all filled him with a sullen protest against the unfairness, the injustice of it all. His adventuring south was also a protest. That such a boy as he was could think of leaving his mother showed a certain fortitude that calls for admiration. There was also the lofting ambition. There was no future for him in Lossiemouth. Other people had gone south and done well. Why not he? He had heard the talk of the village politicians; he had read and liked the stratum of Liberalism that runs through Hugh Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. He had been fired to a great enthusiasm by Henry George's classic political masterpiece, *Progress and Poverty*. This revolutionary gospel had shown him the iniquity of landlordism and had stirred in him a feeling of revolt against the system that prevailed, filling him with an enthusiasm for change. He determined that he would suffer the injustice of poverty not a day longer than he could help. So he fared south.

Like draws to like, and political enthusiasts tend to come together. As soon as he associated with the Trade Union Movement in London, he was noticed. He stood out at once as a distinctive personality. He was young, attractive, capable, enthusiastic, and industrious; but, above and before all, he had the gift of eloquence. His broad Scots accent was not a hindrance but a help. When it was found that this young zealot was willing to do the hard routine work of secretary, his popularity was assured. Anybody could have seen from the steady and inevitable growth of the Labour Movement that the future for an ambitious young man of the working classes

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lay with it. Politics promised a career, especially Labour politics.

He was fortunate in the time of his arrival in London and his entry into the Labour Movement, as it was just the psychological moment for his ultimate success. It is always easy, given certain qualifications, to get advancement in a new movement. The Labour Party was just beginning. MacDonald met the founders ; he got in touch with the leaders. Had he been in the Conservative or Liberal Parties he would have had to serve a long apprenticeship before he would be able to associate with the leaders.

MacDonald recognized the need for organization. He saw the great Trade Unions and their millions of members as sheep without a shepherd. He saw that their financial resources were enormous, their numerical strength overwhelming, their political possibilities incalculable. MacDonald's biggest contribution to politics and progress was his recognition of this vast mass of unused power and the energy that he threw into the effort to secure and use it.

In most democratic Parties the number of members who take any active interest in the affairs is small. Although all the philosophers from Aristotle to Bentham have declared that it is the ' sacred duty ' of humanity to take an interest in public affairs, it is not without reason that the people have been referred to as the *inert mass*. The majority of members of a Trade Union, the majority of members of a Co-operative society, the majority of members of political Parties are as indifferent to the affairs of their organization as the majority of electors are to Parliamentary affairs.

MacDonald was keen. He was more ; he was competent. His keenness made him devote his undoubted ability to the service of the organization. If a man is found willing to do the work, that man very often gets the work to do. MacDonald was willing. He had inherited from his Scots ancestry that substitute for genius, which is the art of taking pains. The apathy of the mass is complete when it comes to questions of organization, administration, and tactics.

The continual increase in size of the organization and the increase of its internal tasks show the need for division of labour and for specialization. This made the call for leaders

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before Thomas Carlyle wrote so brilliantly on the supreme importance of great men or 'heroes.'

MacDonald himself has declared : ' He, the leader, has a scheme to which he works, and he has the power to make his will effective.' This is a view that MacDonald long held. To him the regime of Mussolini and even Hitler had some attractions. His ideal State would have been a benevolent dictatorship, with himself as dictator.

When a worker becomes a leader and renounces his former occupation, he generally has no desire to return to it, and is inclined to cling to his new post for economic reasons. He has attained a higher social status, which he does not wish to lose. Place a man in a position of power among his fellows and he will always seek to extend that power, to consolidate it, to defend it, and to put himself beyond the control of any who might threaten to destroy it. It was Bakunin who said that the possession of power transformed the most devoted friend of liberty into a tyrant. The Socialist leader is tempted to envy the security of the leaders of the other Parties. His practice tends to be represented by the slogan ' Safety First.' He becomes opportunist. To such a one, the self-denying altruism of the Socialist faith becomes more and more anathema, and the metamorphosis of the leader becomes complete. The revolutionary becomes a reformist, no longer inspired by a lofty idealism, but guiding his action by self-regarding intrigue. This moderate doctrine is the religion of the political backslider.

The Socialist in office the world over is often a very different person from the world-shaking iconoclast of the irresponsible opposition. It was Joseph Chamberlain who used to sneer at the wild enthusiasts ' tamed to the Treasury Bench.' Much has been written of this metamorphosis of Socialist leaders. There is not a country on the Continent whose history could not supply many examples of the Socialist who began his political career on the Left, often very extreme, and ended up on the no less extreme Right. There was a time when the Socialist turned reactionary was a commonplace in Europe. Ten years ago in France, most of the politicians of the Right came from the Left. Briand was typical.

In England, MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas followed

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the Continental custom and renounced their Socialist faith to take office in a predominantly Conservative Government. Joseph Chamberlain went from Left to Right; Gladstone reversed the process. 'The rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories' went steadily Left as he grew older and ever put conscience before high office and social prestige. John Burns, the first Labour Cabinet Minister, began on the Left and is more Left to-day than ever. At a crisis in his career, he renounced office rather than compromise his conscience. Lloyd George, in or out of office, has retained an enthusiastic loyalty to the political faith of his youth.

In the Labour Party at the present time there are many who have risen to leadership and remained loyal to their Socialism. Many of them began on the Right and have gone steadily and conscientiously to the Left.

MacDonald was always the most accommodating of Socialists. His Socialism was of the kind that Sir William Harcourt meant when he said on a famous occasion: 'We are all Socialists now.' His Socialism is that far-off Never-Never-Land, born of vague aspirations and described by him in picturesque generalities. It is a Turner landscape of beautiful colours and glorious indefiniteness. He saw it, not with a telescope, but with a kaleidoscope. It is as real and as remote as the garden of the Hesperides. Anyone can believe in it without sacrifice or even inconvenience.

It is evident now that MacDonald never really accepted the Socialist faith of a classless world, based on unselfish service. It can be seen now that he never could have at heart believed in the principles of Brotherhood and self-denial, which are the bases of Socialism.

'Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat.'

Browning's lost leader is a tragedy. The motives for betrayal lie deep in human nature. Some leaders desert for economic reasons—the handful of silver. Some desert for reasons of personal pride and social snobbery.

The consciousness of power has often a demoralizing effect. Sweet are the pleasures of pre-eminence. To renounce a position of honour and security for the sake of a principle is an

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act of patriotic devotion, which is rare in the modern world. MacDonald feared that he might have to make this sacrifice and, to avoid it, committed a great act of political treachery.

The organism, says the scientist, is continually adapted to its environment. There is one part of MacDonald's environment that directed the current of his life. This was his early poverty. It was the background of his motives, and it was a prime factor in his behaviour in the psychological sense. It coloured his outlook and influenced his opinions. His selfishness, his hidden hatreds, his vanity, and even his snobbery, can readily be traced to the inferiority complex that grew in the blighting poverty of his earliest days.

The absolute effects of this phase of MacDonald's environment cannot be estimated. Self-preservation is the first law of life. In the struggle against poverty the laws that obtain are the laws of the jungle, and almost any action could be condoned that helped the victim to escape to freedom and security.

It is MacDonald's conduct after he had climbed clear of the swamp, after he had reached a position of safety, his primary needs satisfied, that calls for the strongest condemnation. Then, he had on excuse, and then it was that he turned on those who had befriended him, and sought to drive deeper into the slough of poverty the people who had helped him out of it.

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## LOW'S CARTOONS

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Grateful acknowledgment is due to the proprietors of the *Evening Standard* and to David Low, Esq., for permission to reproduce the above cartoons.

## FOREWORD

**T**his book is a study of Ramsay MacDonald purely as a politician, not of MacDonald the man.

It is not the intention of the author to write a biography. It is not yet the time for that. It is, therefore, not the purpose of the writer to paint a complete picture. To do so would be to deal with the private and personal side of MacDonald's life, which is quite outside his aim and purpose. This book, therefore, takes no account of MacDonald's private life and refers only to events, incidents, and episodes which arose in his relations to the public, and deals with his character only so far as it is reflected in his political conduct. In so far as MacDonald was typical, this book is a study in political leadership.

It is particularly concerned with the period 1929 onwards, and with the history of the setting up of the 'National' Government.

From August 1931, reaching a climax at the General Election, there was a campaign of slander and abuse against the Labour Party. Those members of the Labour Cabinet who had resigned were denounced as cowards who were afraid to do their duty, as traitors who betrayed their trust, as shirkers who funk'd an unpopular task. They were constantly taunted in the House of Commons as 'The-Men-Who-Ran-Away.' On the other hand, those who joined the 'National' Government were applauded for their courage, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. Mr. MacDonald was acclaimed as a hero who saved the country from ruin; Mr. Henderson was reviled as a recreant who let the country down. Mr. William Graham was disparaged as one who put himself first; Mr. J. H. Thomas was applauded because, as he said himself, he unselfishly put his country first.

I felt that in view of this slander on the integrity of the Labour Party I should record my version of what actually took place

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in 1931, and the events which led up to it. I had thought that if one had a case to put before the British public, it would be possible to put that case. I had thought that the freedom of the Press and of publication had been won. I was mistaken. I found that the publication of such a book was a difficult and even dangerous adventure. The character of the book became known to several people interested, and they recognized that it was an exposure of the 'National' Government, and that its publication must be prevented. Persuasion was tried first. Certain friends of mine were approached with the object of persuading me not to publish the book. Before I had actually written it I was told I would be engaged on a sleeveless errand, as the publication of a book attacking MacDonald and the 'National' Government would not be tolerated. It was against the public interest, and damaging to the prestige of the Government.

Later, persuasion developed into coercion.

Although there is nothing in the book that comes even remotely within the scope of the Official Secrets Act, my ignorance of the Act was presumed and I was warned that I would be prosecuted under this statute.

They could not prevent the Author writing such a book, but they could set about to prevent its being printed and published. A publisher or a printer might be intimidated by threats of legal action. That bane of publishers and editors, the law of libel, was invoked. Even subsidiary characters in the story were approached, shown the chapters and pages where references to them occurred, and urged to threaten the publishers with legal proceedings if the allusions were not deleted. Several interesting communications resulted. One came from a famous Member of Parliament, not even mentioned by name and not otherwise readily identifiable, who was persuaded to write a letter threatening proceedings unless a certain paragraph were deleted.

A London editor, inquiring why there was so long delay in publishing the book, was told that the publication had been abandoned, and the reason given was that 'the Prime Minister didn't like it.'

Obviously the fitting time to publish was when MacDonald was alive and could answer its charges, and if possible refute its

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indictment. But the book was written some time ago, and the fact that it had not been published until now is no fault of the Author.

I was told that I must not publish an attack on MacDonald while he was Prime Minister, as it was in the national interest that confidence in the Premier be maintained.

I was told when MacDonald left the Government that it was not fair to kick a man when he was down.

I was told when MacDonald died that it was not right to attack a man when he is dead.

This would mean that alive or dead nothing but praise was due a Premier. Finally, the question of good taste has been raised. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is an excellent maxim and one to which considerable importance is attached in this country, but it cannot be held to apply to the politics and political conduct of statesmen, for these are matters of public interest and common concern.

Politicians are a class apart in so far as they have to present themselves to the judgment of the people, to seek their suffrage, and appeal for their support and confidence.

In a democratic country the most important public duty a citizen has to perform is to choose those who make the laws. If he is to make an intelligent choice between parties or policies, his judgment must be based on evidence. In 1931 the issue before the people of this country was, in the last analysis, the honesty and the bona fides of the 'National' Government. That is still the dominant issue in British politics. I hope that this book may assist the ordinary citizen to a fair and just judgment.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *INFANCY*

**I**n the tiny, two-roomed cottage of his mother's mother, in the little, old-world village of Lossiemouth, James Ramsay MacDonald was born on 18 October 1866 in circumstances of direst poverty.

Read with appreciation and discernment, that single sentence is the keynote of MacDonald's career. The two factors which are vital in every man's life—heredity and environment—are there in those simple words. He inherited his physical characteristics from his Scots parents, and his environment, during the most impressionable years of his life, was to be the poverty-stricken condition of so many Scots youths, the fond, doting care of mother and grandmother, the growing up with Scots companions, and priceless endowment of education in a Scots village school.

The village of Lossiemouth is not typically Highland, as it is so often described ; the natives are not for the most part of the Celtic race, and Gaelic is not spoken there. Indeed, it is in many respects a Lowland village. It is a quaint old Scots clachan, half rural, half fishing, on the shore of the beautiful Moray Firth. The Plains of Abraham at Quebec, where Wolfe led his Highlanders to victory, have been elevated to the dignity of a golf course, and likewise, industry having languished, Lossiemouth, of historic memory, is now a golfer's paradise. To-day the village, changing with the times, has lost much of its old-world charm, and only the antiquarian recalls the great historical association of the place, the storied stones of Spynie Castle, the Palace of the notable Bishops of Moray, and the romantic ruins of Elgin Cathedral, built more than seven centuries ago. It is strange that MacDonald was born almost under the walls of Fitzgavenny, where Macbeth is alleged to have murdered Duncan.

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Lossiemouth is beautiful both in summer and in winter, with its changeful sea of green and blue, but specially so on a bright summer day when, flecked with foam, the wild sea-horses, tossing their snowy manes, gallop shoreward. Beautiful, too, when in the keen, caller air of a winter day the biting breeze blows over the eastern waters, and cold, icy blasts come from out the lowering northern sky. Beautiful, too, when the warm, gentle airs sidle up from the south. Beautiful even in the rain and when the heat mists dim the brightness of its rocky coast. And there is always the tonic tang of the sea air. No one who has lived by the sea can fail to hear, even amid the clamour and distractions of a great city, its clear call. The memory of the richest autumn sunsets in purple and red and gold 'haunt the exile, and often he recalls the dark winter nights with the moan of the sea passing over the land like the crying of toiling creation.'

In this quiet little town the simple folk lived—fisher folk, rural workers, and artisans, plain people all, without ostentation and without parade. MacDonald's mother had no house of her own, and he was born and brought up in the home of his grandmother. It was a small, thatched, two-apartment cottage—a 'but and ben,' as they call it in Scotland. The grandmother, his mother's mother, was a woman of outstanding personality, a rare character of great intelligence. His mother had to go to work, and the boy was left much in her care. His grandmother had been a servant in the house of one of the gentry of the district in her earlier days, and this position of servitude, however agreeable, had had its effect upon her mind and outlook. She had been a woman of real, rustic beauty; this, combined with her natural ability, gained for her the respect of her employers and a good repute among her neighbours. Even when a change came in her circumstances, she retained in her poverty a certain dignity and natural grace of manner.

It was under the influence of this remarkable woman that MacDonald grew up. She was a real Celt, full of alluring lore of bygone times and firm in her belief in the eerie and uncanny. At her knee, he listened in youthful awe to stories of fairies and witches, the 'second sight' and the evil eye, and heard, in wistful wonder, the haunting legends of Celtic mythology.

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It is, indeed, impossible to estimate the effect of all this upon an impressionable and sensitive nature. Belief in supernatural manifestations, in 'second sight' and other spiritual phenomena, linger long in the Highland glens, and even in the South many clairvoyants claim to belong to the Celtic race. I have heard MacDonald tell, with all the serious sincerity of conviction, how his grandmother would sometimes have an amazing, supernatural experience. He had seen her fall into a trance, so to speak. Her spirit, obedient to some celestial call, would pass elsewhere, and she would, as it were, catch a glimpse of the heavenly vision. These physical manifestations made an impression on the sensitive boy that remained with him all his life.

Surely no one ever attained power and reputation under such adverse circumstances. His privation began with his birth and continued until he reached manhood. His first great loss was the affection, care, advice, and example of a father. A boy brought up by his mother and grandmother tends to develop a distinctive, subjective idiosyncrasy. His heredity and environment would stimulate all sorts of inhibitions, suspicions, hidden hatreds, and other psychological repercussions in a nature so peculiarly impressionable. The only male person in the household, drawing all the attention and affection of two women of distinctive personality, was apt to be a little hero, lionized and idolized. Such home environment was the worst possible for fortifying his character. It developed morbid fear reactions and made for softness. It fed that proud vanity, huffy jealousy, and petty petulance of which he has been so often accused. The ready sympathy which thus soothed his childhood sorrows he sought for right through his life.

MacDonald's mother was poor, but she bequeathed to him an incomparable heritage—his Scottish nationality. The Scottish race has made as great a contribution to the advance of civilization and the progress of humanity as any people that this world has known. In every department of human endeavour, intellectual, industrial, commercial, scientific and artistic, the achievement of the Scot has been considerable, distinctive, and often pre-eminent. Less than one-tenth of the population of England, she has contributed many times her due proportion to the pool of national achievement. Thus the ability, ambition, energy and determination which raised

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MacDonald to such supreme heights may be traced to his Scots ancestry.

Not only of Scottish descent, MacDonald had a Highland parentage. The Scottish Highlander may be a paradox of personality, a strange amalgam of contradictory characteristics, but even the Englishman finds him particularly picturesque and attractive.

A romantic glamour surrounds the name of MacDonald, the greatest of the Highland clans. Earl Baldwin is proud that his mother was a MacDonald from the misty isle of Skye. Every schoolboy knows of the romantic story of the great 'Fighting MacDonald,' whom grateful Napoleon made Marshal of France and Duke of Tarentum ; of the valour of the MacDonalds at Bannockburn and their tragic petulance at Culloden ; of the immortal epic of the Thin Red Line at Balaclava ; of the terrible story of the massacre of the MacDonalds at Glencoe ; and of the idyll of the sweet devotion of Flora MacDonald.



## CHAPTER TWO

### EDUCATION

Scotland has always had a zealous care for the education of the children. At one time religion and education were its twin devotions, but the association between them is not now as close as it once was. Not only is education the most important factor in the environment of youth, but its formative potency is second only to heredity. Many attribute the high place taken by Scotsmen in the world to the great respect in which education is held in their country. Is the Scotsman better educated than his competitors? I was anxious to have the views of an educated Englishman on this point, and I had an opportunity of finding out when, one day in 1931, a 'man of Kent,' a notable Englishman, the strange, elusive, romantic Mr. Montagu Norman, the financier who seems to be Life Governor of the Bank of England, came swaggering into the Prime Minister's Secretaries' Room at the House of Commons. With his hat at a rakish tilt, he was a study of picturesque *négligé*—the Bohemian turned banker, with traces of the former persisting. He recognized my Scots accent and hailed me.

"Do you know," he said, "three-quarters of my time is taken up with Scotsmen."

"Yes," I replied, "like you, they are all in the money business."

He smiled and went on to pay Scotsmen a high compliment. Praise from such an Englishman was praise indeed. He spoke of the wonderful position that the Scottish race had won for itself in the world. The Scot enters the race often handicapped by poverty and without influence of family or friends, and he wins through to a position of honour and influence.

In Scotland the 'lad o' pairts' is a lad apart. He is the boy endowed above the lave with conspicuous qualities of mind or character. The task of the 'dominie' is to educate and

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inspire his callow loons with that *perfeividium ingenium Scotorum* so characteristic of the race.

The tradition of the old Scottish dominie is now almost forgotten ; a new educator has come upon the scene with newer ideas to make the changes demanded by the progress of modern pedagogics. The three R's were put first in the Scots educational curriculum, and after these came history, poetry, and religious knowledge. The Bible and the Shorter Catechism were taught so thoroughly and painstakingly in schools that their vocabularies have entered into the common everyday speech of the people. Phrases from the Bible and old-fashioned expressions keep recurring even in the speeches of Scots Members in the House of Commons. Listen, for example, to David Kirkwood, the big, warm-hearted, gentle-souled fire-brand, and you hear phrases and whole sentences redolent of the Scriptures. He is at his favourite theme, denouncing his political opponents with vehement but colourful invective. "Look at them," he declaims, waving a demonstrative hand, "there they sit the noo, but the day is comin' when we shall chase them ower the border an' awa'. We shall smite them *hip and thigh and pursue them from Dan even to Beer-sheba unto the going down of the sun*. The Minister of Health may get awa' wi' it the noo, but he shall not ultimately escape. He will have to pay hereafter *for the deeds done in the body*. '*Vengeance is mine ; I will repay,*' saith the Lord."

That is Kirkwood, harking back to his schooldays' vernacular. His early study of these books, 'wells of English undefiled,' has given the Scot a vocabulary ready at hand. The reading of history as it is read in Scotland tends to fire the young Scot with an irresistible ambition to make a name for himself in the great world outside, and to achieve the fame of the great men of whom he has been reading in school. Scottish mothers are keen on schooling. It is said to be the aim of every Scots mother, and particularly of every Highland mother, that her son should 'wag his pow' in a pulpit. The path to that pre-eminence leads through the school.

The day came when young Ramsay was enrolled, with becoming ceremony, a pupil of the small rural parish school at Drainie, some distance from his home. Not only was he fortunate in going to school in Scotland ; he was fortunate in

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his teacher. The Rev. John MacDonald had been quick to recognize that James Ramsay MacDonald was a boy of distinction, and devoted special care and help to his education. MacDonald has himself drawn a delightful pen portrait of his old schoolmaster :

‘ Long did the dominic linger in retirement to gladden the hearts of his scholars. The boys whom he taught and flogged had wandered far. They are men of middle age now, bald in counting-houses, bronzed on prairies, salted at sea ; but when they returned to where they played as ragamuffins, they never forgot that the dominic would be glad to see them, to live with them some of their schooldays, and to hear from them how they fared. They, on the other hand, never thought of leaving without seeing the dominic. They came back to him as schoolboys—the most successful of them, who had found little to fear in the world, could not throw off every tremor of bashful terror, every discomfort of the palpitating heart, as they approached. He remained to them the dominic to the end, not because they feared, but because they revered him.’

These reminiscences of his schooldays illustrate MacDonald’s descriptive style.

‘ We had a long way to go to school, and the road was bleak. In the summer-time we lengthened it, for there were nests in the gorse and the trees, and the sea was enticing. Sometimes, alas, we never got there at all, and our ears were deaf to his whistle. Hidden behind trees or amongst the whins, we saw him come to the door, survey the empty playground, put to his lips the key upon which he summoned us to lessons, presently come again when there was no response to his call, and blow a short, angry blast—all to no purpose. The call of the wild was upon us. The woods, the bushes, the caves, the seashore had us in thrall for the day. We then thought him very angry ; but later on, when we came to talk over these mishaps, we knew that it was the heart of the boy that admonished us next morning, and controlled the strokes that made our fingers tingle, and that, whilst he stood with the instrument of torture in his hand—

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the school giggling behind us the while—instead of the lecture he gave us, he would have liked to say : “ I wish I had been with you, but you know that would not have done.”

‘ We always felt, however, that the penalty was just, and that the whole transaction had been good. He never punished without making us feel that. The rain poured upon us at other times, and we were soaked through on the road ; then the dominie stirred the fire for us while we steamed in front of it ; the snow also came, and we had to walk on tops of dykes when it blew ; then he let us out early, to get home by nightfall. Passing in review those days now that they have gone far past, the dominie is never out of the picture. The friend with the ruddy face that never looked old up to the very last, clothed almost always in light grey clothes, of leisurely mien, with the soft voice and the wagging finger, always comes in. No memory of the school is possible without him. What was his genius ? Nothing recondite ; nothing requiring unravelment by analytical minds. The simple kindness of the teacher is perhaps the most precious gift he can give to his scholars. By that he gathers them to his knee, as it were, and puts his arms about them, and they never forget.

‘ Like so many others of his calling and generation, in his younger years he saw the pulpit behind the desk, and he was a “ rev.,” but, by the mercy of Providence the pulpit remained a vision, and the desk a reality. In those days the Elementary School was not skimmed of its cream, and drudgery alone was not the lot of the village dominie. We were a humbler and a ruder folk. We stayed where we were taught the A B C until we passed into the University or the world. The machinery was as old as Knox ; the education was the best ever given to the sons and daughters of men. So instead of going a few miles off by train for the higher wisdom, we got it from the dominie. . . .’<sup>1</sup>

The Scot has discovered that education is desirable not only for its own sake, but as a help along the road to fame and fortune. But for the most of Scots boys the time at school is shortened, for boys must get to work to add their

<sup>1</sup> *Scottish Educational Journal*, 26 September 1919.

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meagre earnings to the family income. The only avenue to higher education for a poor Scots scholar was to become a pupil-teacher. It is indicative of the opinion that the schoolmaster must have formed of MacDonald that he put an end to a short spell of field-work by taking the youth back to school as a pupil-teacher. The schoolmaster of Drainie would have liked MacDonald to specialize in the classics and mathematics, but the bent of his mind and his keenest interest were towards science. Science—especially physical and biological science—was then very popular.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed revolutionary changes in political, scientific, and religious thought. Fierce acrimonious controversies were waged between scientists and theologians. Faction fights in the churches weakened their defences against the onslaught of the scientist. The discoveries of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall added fuel to the discussions and stirred a wave of enthusiasm for science among the youth of the time. Publishers vied with each other in producing works of popular science in fortnightly parts. Newspapers 'featured' series of science articles. Cheap science handbooks were readily available. MacDonald boasts that, at this time, he read every scientific work he could lay his hands on.

Samuel Smiles has written the stimulating story of Robert Dick, the baker and geologist, and has immortalized the story of that other genius of science, Thomas Edward, the shoemaker-naturalist. There was also before MacDonald the example of Hugh Miller, the stone-mason who became famous as scientist and author. The writings of that gifted artisan were very popular. MacDonald has spoken of the inspiration that he received from Hugh Miller's autobiographical masterpiece, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. It was published in 1852, fourteen years before MacDonald was born. It was a best-seller in its day and can still be found in many working-class homes in Scotland. Miller was a tremendous controversialist, and he had also the Scotsman's keenness for theological argument. Although a zealous churchman, he was somewhat of a rebel. His knowledge of geology, acquired at great cost in labour and study, was profound, and he sought to use it to confute the rising school of scientific sceptics led by

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Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall. He fought hard against the acceptance of the principle of organic evolution, and this obscurantist attitude, with his all too zealous championship of an outworn theology, led finally to disaster. He lost hope in his task, gave way to despair, and ended a useful and strenuous life in suicide.

Miller's great masterpiece can never die and with his other work remains a great record of a remarkable life. The last words of his introduction to his great work are significant.

'My aims have, I trust, been honest ones ; and should I in any degree succeed in rousing the humbler classes to the important work of self-culture and self-government, and in convincing the higher that there are instances in which working men have at least as legitimate a claim to their respect as to their pity, I shall not deem the ordinary penalties of the autobiographer a price too high for the accomplishment of ends so important.'

There is every evidence that books played a prominent part in the life of young MacDonald. He was an enthusiastic and omnivorous reader.

'I was not,' he says, 'one of those fortunates who could steal to some quiet corner where there were wonderful books, and live in a beautiful or romantic world all by myself. A great three-volumed Brown's Bible in sheep-skin, a huge *Life of Christ*, which I could not lift, but whose back in green polished leather always attracted me, some collections of sermons and a few books bound in black on theology and Church history, a volume or two of the classics in their original, and some tattered odds and ends, were all I inherited by way of books.

'In the neighbouring city there were booksellers' shops, and thither I used to hasten to linger at their windows. My beginnings in general reading were made standing there, stealing from the pages of books exposed to view what delight they could give me. I used to walk ten miles on Saturdays to do this. When I was a proud possessor of a penny, it was not even to the booksellers I went, however. Their prices, even at the lowest, were not for me. There was a pawnbroker

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in the city, and he sold me his "rubbish" for next to nothing, and the lightest burden ever I brought home was Orr's *Circle of the Sciences* (who knows it now?) which I got with a few other books for one penny.

'A notch was cut in my life when, in passing into a new class at school, my reading-book was one of Chambers's Readers, which was really an anthology from the great writers. To that class-book I owe peace and happiness untold. It was my first sip at the springs of English Literature. Before many days were over I had read through it. It was no mere lesson book; it was a revelation of a new world. Long, long afterwards I read Keats's sonnet on Chapman's Homer, and I remembered my Chambers's Reader.

*"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken."*

'Thenceforth I knew the music, the colour, and the dignity of words, and the grand companionship of those who were their masters.

'These two books came into my hands, each of which in its own way had great influence upon me. We had a ragman who went about pushing a barrow. He was reputed to have attended college, and, as he went round with his bowls, he often had an open book in front of him, stuck up against his crockery, from which he read as he pushed. We gave him a bad time, I regret now to say, and we were anathema to him. One day I made bold to steal up and read his book, and became so absorbed that he caught me. Instead of getting the welcome with his foot or fist which I expected, he asked me in a kindly voice if I was interested. I said I was, and asked for a loan of it. "Take it," said he, "it will do you more good than it will me." I bore away a volume of Thucydides in English. What a story! What men! What stirring tales and movements! How the long winter evenings sped! How the shadows beyond the lamp-glow became the trying-place of heroes!

'In the booksellers' windows I had read pages of Hugh Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, and one day an old tattered copy became mine. I lived in a place of interesting

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geology, and in a vague sort of way the Cromarty stone-mason had become a hero. He had been a workman ; he was really a neighbour ; he had visited my own place in his excursions and had written about it. Here was his story of his own life—the little village and his thatched home, his sturdy uncle, his work in a quarry and as a mason, his pursuit of knowledge, his triumphs by his own power and labour. He taught me that time and life were precious. Being native to my own soil no doubt added to the influence of the book. It imparted affection for my scene and respect for my people. Sea and coast, rock and stream, every feature of the landscape and the people amongst whom I lived, came nearer as it were, and a new companionship with the spirit of championship in it rose up between us. 'The man whose surroundings are but dead earth to him and whose people are but as beasts of the field will not get far—except perhaps in business.

*"Shades of the dead, have I not heard your voices  
Rise in the night-rolling breath of the gale?"*

'The wide battlefields of the world were no longer remote, its holy places no longer afar off, its energies no longer confined to where life surges in busy centres, its heroes no longer men of dead times or of other fates than our own. They tell me that the book is no longer read and that it has dropped out from the creative influences of the lives of our younger people. I can only hope that that which now fills its place is as valuable in imparting the energy of life and the habits of self-discipline and self-respect as *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. I still occasionally take down from my shelves the volumes of Hugh Miller with which I spent many an hour of satisfaction. I hate to have to see faults that, thank goodness, in callower days I never saw ; but I count myself blessed that a city bookseller once displayed open in his window the book in which the Cromarty stone-mason writes on himself.

'Novels in my youth were doubtful books. They crowded the booksellers' windows and were bound in paper with attractive pictures on the outside, but they cost the ruinous price of sixpence and were never shown open ; so I was cut off from them. One day in a farmhouse kitchen I found a



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copy of Scott's *Betrothed*. I know not if its title had lured the heart of a servant who brought it there (for they are warm-hearted people in farm kitchens and bothies), or whether there was such a robust admirer of Sir Walter on that steading as to value this unfortunate tale just because it was his. However, it had there no owner, and I carried it away with me. The haunting jingle of the wraith :

“ *Widow'd wife and wedded maid,  
Betrothed, betrayer, and betray'd* ”

and the gripping rhymes at the head of some of the chapters carried me through. Thus I had a hard introduction to Scott. It was a dull road to a delectable land, wherein I have been wandering ever since and where, so soon as I enter, youth is renewed by magic refreshment. When I go back in the body to the places where “ my young footsteps in infancy wandered ” Scott meets me at my fireside, and whether I hold *Waverley* or *Rob Roy*, *Redgauntlet* or *Guy Mannering*, or any of the others in my hand, the Wizard is the Wizard still, the drudgery of life ends, and the days pass in glorious companionship with that wonderful pageant of humanity into which Scott breathed the breath of life.

‘ This world of being and events created by the imagination of man suddenly expanded, and I roamed far and deep into it when a son of the village returned to die at his mother’s fireside. He had been a watch-maker and had been South, where he had bought liberally of those books that were sold in monthly parts, and had bound them. Amongst them were Dickens and Burns, Shakespeare and *Elegant Extracts*. He doted upon them. When I first saw him, he was sitting bent-shouldered, pale and thin, stooping over one of them. His white skeleton hands rested on its pages while he gasped for breath. I was afraid to approach him. I felt awe and dread for one looking so closely upon eternity. With feeble breath that he seemed unable to command, he told me of the pleasure he had from *Pickwick*. His cheeks flushed as merriment strove to elude the grasping hand of death, and he had to pause, for his cough was sore upon him. At the end of each attack, he pushed his dark hair from his brow, which he wiped with a large handkerchief. I saw the perspiration

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on it. Thus I was introduced to *Pickwick* and to Dickens. Whenever I finished one of the heavy volumes, I took it back wrapped in a clean white towel, and took away another. There was something in keeping with death when I handed the snow-white bundle to him and received another from his hands. When I read the last, I remember his remark: "Aye! Aye! everything comes to an end. Ye're a fast reader. I thought the books would have lasted my time, but they are through afore me. Ye'll no stop here. Ye're nae born for this place. Ye'll gang South ae day and ye'll maybe remember me and my books." To this day I cannot touch *Pickwick* without thinking of "Jamie Russell, Annie Russell's son," and now the long row of thirty volumes of Dickens, bound in green on my shelves, is like a tablet to his memory.

'Only one other book need be recalled, and it will be done in this way. I was dining one night in the company of people who in various walks of life had attained to some position, and, on being asked what was my university, had replied *Cassell's Popular Educator*. Later in the evening, a well-known doctor, who was sitting some way off, came up and asked me if he had overheard my remark aright. He had been the acting editor of my edition and of its companion volumes, *Science for All*. These books launched me into the wider and more open sea of knowledge. The little source-springs had run down, had been broadened and deepened by the waters of many tributary rivulets and had reached the open sea. The book had become the library, this and that introduction had become a great companionship, and the thrilling revelations and discoveries of youth and hardship had become the peaceful enjoyment of more mature and comfortable years.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Schoolmaster*, 30 March 1928.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *THIN DAYS IN LONDON*

**M**acDonald's first adventure outside Scotland was when he obtained a temporary post as secretary in Bristol. 'The Bristol experiment did not turn out a success,' he says, 'and I therefore came to London. I did not know a soul in London at that time.' For a youth to leave his home in a small, friendly town and venture far into the great unknown and friendless city was a dangerous experiment, calling for magnificent courage. He was an enthusiast for himself. He had his eye on the heights. Essentially egocentric, he had confidence that in the great city his abilities would get the consideration and reward that they deserved.

His first days in London might well have daunted him. He tells us that he had to undergo the deepest privation. Sometimes, indeed, he reached what the economists call 'primary poverty' and was actually in want. Friendless, proud, sensitive, shy, he trudged the streets on that most heart-breaking and pitiless of all errands, looking for work. Although life had been hard in Lossiemouth, poverty is never so terrible or so cruel in a small town as it is in a great metropolis.

This period of desperate adversity must have left its mark on his mind and coloured his outlook on life. As he suffered, he pondered. 'There was,' he says, 'a little too much luxury at one end of the social scale—a little too much poverty at the other.' His thoughts had already turned to politics as the only way out. Before he had left Lossiemouth, he had taken an active part in local politics. He was then a Liberal with Radical tendencies, and he has told us why.

'My childhood was spent at a time when the larger farmers were turning the people off the land, and when the good, honest hatred the Scotsman has for landlords was being encouraged and was taking deep root. The whole of my

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part of Scotland was Radical, and we seem to have been born with the democratic strongly developed in us. In consequence, we looked down, from the moment of our birth, on the people we called "swells" and thought ourselves quite as good as, and a good deal better than, they were.<sup>1</sup>

At that time a great wave of Radical and democratic thought was sweeping over the country. MacDonald felt the surge of a new enthusiasm and flung himself wholeheartedly into the fray. After Gladstone, the Grand Old Man, the hero-worshipper of Lossiemouth put Joseph Chamberlain, then a Radical. Chamberlain had visited Scotland and in the capital of the Highlands had made a tremendous attack on landlordism. MacDonald had made his first entry into political life on behalf of a Mr. Anderson, a Radical candidate, in 1885. Anderson, however, was defeated.

It is interesting to note that MacDonald's great gifts were recognized from the first. He no sooner joined any organization than he was lifted almost at once into an executive position. In view of the many offices in political organizations that he had held in the course of his career, it is significant that his first public position was as President of the Lossiemouth Democratic Association.

Some sedulous antiquarian has exhumed from the dusty files of a defunct and long-forgotten journal a letter dated 27 December 1885, which is signed 'James Ramsay MacDonald, Lossiemouth.' It is a curious fragment. In these days of the Youth Movement, this juvenile epistle carries a touch of modernity.

'Thoughtful young men in all parts of the country,' he writes, 'are beginning to see that the end of the present state of things is near. The ardour of youth still unblemished by the poisonous taint of the battle of life—much of which is so dishonourably fought—is fired with details of the misery and woe, and their hearts go forth to the misery of the poor. Never yet knowing what it is to wrong their brothers, they love and sympathize with them all. Still being upright, they feel as if throughout their lives they would dare to stand aloof from injustice. Not yet demoral-

<sup>1</sup> *Sunday Express*, 9 June 1929.

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ized by wealth, or effeminate with ease, they possess unsullied the chivalry of Britons. Now I have thought : why cannot these men be united ? Why cannot their sympathies, so easily blunted, be deepened by being based on principles ? Cannot these human feelings be the foundation of ideas ? <sup>1</sup>

This is an illuminating document. It would be easy to sneer at its youthful optimism and fine fervour, but it reveals a zeal for political progress and a real hope in political idealism. It was a get-together call to the 'unsullied chivalry' of youth. Why should not youth of goodwill unite against the forces of privilege and reaction ?

Shortly after MacDonald's arrival in London, he determined to join some advanced political society. The Fabian Society seemed nearest to his point of view in its general policy. Although the first tenet of its creed runs : 'The Fabian Society consists of Socialists,' yet it holds out its hand to any member of any party. Its work is mainly educational ; it has intellectual prestige ; it is engaged in persistent political propaganda and believes that converts can be made by insidious permeation of Liberals and Progressives rather than by demanding, as a preliminary, the renunciation of party loyalties. This attitude of divided allegiance has had various results. On the one hand, many Liberals have found the Fabian Society a convenient stepping-stone to the acceptance of independent Socialism ; but, on the other hand, Labour candidates fully endorsed by the Labour Party have found themselves opposed at Parliamentary and other elections by members of the Fabian Society. The anomaly arose through both competing candidates being members of the Labour Party. A notorious case of this kind occurred in Glasgow some years ago, when a fully endorsed Labour candidate found himself opposed at an important election by a prominent Liberal, Sir Daniel Stevenson, who was a prominent member of the Glasgow Fabian Society, and, therefore, through affiliation, a member of the Labour Party. This case was brought up at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, but the anomaly was condoned on the principle that the intellectual, social, and financial contributions of the Fabians to the Labour Party outweighed the trifling irregularity.

<sup>1</sup> *Star*, 31 July 1924.

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MacDonald did not join the Fabian Society as a half-way house to Socialism, or he would not have mingled the pale pink of Fabianism with the scarlet Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation. Another organization that helped MacDonald to express himself was the New Fellowship. This Society of young people was an 'uplift' organization designed, as MacDonald said, 'to emphasize the ethical factor in social life.'

At the exclusive gatherings of the Fabians, young MacDonald came in contact with the celebrities of the Society, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, Mrs. Besant, the late Professor Graham Wallas, and, of course, George Bernard Shaw, of whom he says: 'I remember him as a red-headed person whom everybody knew, who was writing for Mrs. Besant's *Monthly Corner*, and whose jokes I generally thought bad. His early work was issued by the Modern Press, and I have a copy of *Cashel Byron's Profession* in its original paper covers.'

The very fact that MacDonald has been inclined in later days to vivify the description of his early experiences in London with colourful embellishments is an indication of the tremendous effect that they must have had upon his youthful mind at the time. He tells of how he enjoyed life when, like Goldsmith's parson, he was 'passing rich with forty pounds a year.'

'I lived like a fighting cock, saved money, had a holiday in Scotland, and helped to keep my mother, and in addition, I paid fees at the Birkbeck, the City of London College, and the Highbury Institute, out of my salary.'

It looks impossible, but he has told us how it was done.

'How did I manage to do it? In the first place, I used to buy myself whatever food I wanted around the slums of King's Cross, but I used to receive my staple food, oatmeal, sent to me from home, and I always paid for it. Of course, I could not afford tea or coffee, but I found hot water quite as good as tea from the point of view of food, and that it tastes as well when once you have grown used to it. In the middle of the day I had a meal at Pearce and Plenty's in Aldersgate Street. I don't think I ever spent more than twopence or threepence on it, although it was the meal of the day. It generally consisted of beefsteak pudding. I don't

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know that there was very much beefsteak in it, but it filled up a corner and certainly did me no harm. My food bill worked out at about sevenpence or eightpence a day for everything, so that saving was easy.

‘After a time I received a rise, and was put into the counting-house at a pound a week. Soon after this a friend who had given me the free run of his laboratory gave me some chemical work to do. This enabled me to leave this counting-house, which was my undoing, for I stayed at home working, morning, afternoon, and night. I never went out, with the result that I broke down in health. Having no capital, as soon as I recovered I had to go and look for more work.’

This talk of enjoying his poverty-stricken condition came easily when time with its mellowing influence had softened the shadows, and distance lent enchantment to the view, especially when seen through the haze and harmony of a banquet in the City. There is no doubt, however, that few men worked harder to achieve an ambition than did Ramsay MacDonald. He allowed himself no leisure. He was anxious to become a teacher of science. After his day’s work was done, the eager student sat late into the morning hours, studying, studying, studying. Then he would snatch a little rest and yet steal a couple of hours from sleep before leaving in the morning. Unfortunately his health was affected by the strain, and he had to give up this project just when success seemed imminent.

As one door closes, another opens. ‘Fortune favours the brave,’ but it also favours the diligent. MacDonald now took a step which determined his future. It was usual for Members of Parliament who could afford it to employ clever young men as their private secretaries, to answer their letters, to write their speeches, and to organize their constituencies. Thomas Lough, afterwards the popular politician known as Tommy Lough, was not then a Member of Parliament, but was desirous of becoming one. He offered the keen young Scot the post of private secretary at a salary of £75 a year, rising to £100. Both sides gained by the bargain. Lough gained fame, and Ramsay MacDonald, as he said himself, ‘attained fortune.’

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This change in his circumstances had another result—important to an ambitious politician. The post gave him an inside view of politics. It did more. Tommy Lough was wealthy. To the young secretary the London mansion of his employer was a liberal education; he saw wealth at close quarters, and the ease, comfort, and security that wealth brings. Lough was popular, and MacDonald was brought into contact with men and women notable in the political and social world. The young man, who a few months before had been starving in the lonely wilderness which is London to the stranger, now encountered another kind of life, and the contrast made an impression on his sensitive mind which later years only served to deepen. His social progress was from the poor cottage in Scotland and the dingy lodgings in North London to the mansion in Mayfair. This was his first experience of anything but poverty—his first step up the social ladder—and doubtless he resolved that he would never go back. The four pleasant years spent with this political notable were invaluable; he not only gained a knowledge of the political machine from the inside, but his experience gave him later a cultural superiority over his contemporaries in the Labour Movement.

For some time before leaving Lough, MacDonald had been doing some literary work and free-lance journalism. He worked also with Sir Sidney Lee on the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Some men of British names whose surnames begin with initials from M to the end of the alphabet may have been immortalized in that biographical dictionary by a future Prime Minister.

There were no Labour newspapers in those days, and MacDonald contributed to Liberal journals. As a Fabian, he believed that some amelioration of social distress might be won by social reform, but his faith in Liberal protestations of friendship with Labour got a severe shake. When a vacancy occurred at Southampton, some of the most progressive Liberals asked the Fabian Society to suggest a suitable candidate. Young MacDonald, who had by this time graduated from the soap-box and had become a notable speaker, was offered to Southampton. It was a two-member constituency, and MacDonald was hopeful that he might be chosen as the second Liberal Member. He travelled down from London and



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met the local Liberal Association, but Southampton fought shy even of so tame a revolutionary as the young Fabian. The lesson of this rebuff was not lost on the ambitious young man. But it required one more defeat to shatter MacDonald's hopes in Liberalism. A by-election took place at Attercliffe. A trade-unionist was put forward, but the Liberals refused to support him. This decided MacDonald to leave the Liberals and link up with Keir Hardie, who was then conducting a raging, tearing propaganda through the country, under the auspices of the newly formed Independent Labour Party.

On 15 July 1894 he wrote to the great Labour leader as follows:

“ MY DEAR HARDIE—

‘ I am now making personal application for membership of the I.L.P. I have stuck to the Liberals up to now, hoping that they might do something to justify the trust that we have put in them. Attercliffe came as a rude awakening, and I felt during that contest that it was quite impossible for me to maintain my position as a Liberal any longer. Calmer consideration has but strengthened that conviction, and, if you now care to accept me amongst you, I shall do what I can to support the I.L.P. Between you and me there never was any dispute as to objects. What I could not quite accept was your methods. I have changed my opinion. Liberalism, and more particularly local Liberal Associations, have definitely declared against Labour, and so I must accept the facts of the situation, and candidly admit that the prophecies of the I.L.P. relating to Liberalism have been amply justified. The time for conciliation has gone by, and those of us who are in earnest in our professions must declare definitely ourselves. I may say that, in the event of elections, I shall place part of my spare time at the disposal of the Party, to do what work may seem good to you.

‘ Yours very sincerely,

‘ J. R. MACDONALD.’

‘ Trust the people,’ had been the slogan of Gladstone ; but, although the Liberal Party were willing, within limits, to trust the people, it was only as voters not as legislators. They still recruited their members from the wealthier classes. Their candidates, for the most part, were educated at the public

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schools of England, and the great universities. In 1874, Alexander MacDonald and Thomas Burt, who were miners' representatives, were returned as Members of Parliament, but they were elected as orthodox Liberals, and others of the spiritless, hermaphrodite Liberal-Labour type had been since elected. It is to the credit of Keir Hardie that he ended all that. In 1892 Hardie stood as an Independent Labour candidate in the slum division of West Ham, and was actually returned in defiance of both Liberals and Tories.

MacDonald saw this happen and read the lesson aright. He joined with Hardie in earnestly and energetically endeavouring to induce the Trade Unions to stand for independent labour representation in the House of Commons. It was thus a great victory for Hardie and MacDonald when the Trade Union Congress instructed its Parliamentary Committee to call a conference of delegates of all the Co-operative Societies, Trade Unions, and other working-class organizations, 'to devise ways and means for the securing of an increased number of Labour Members in the next Parliament.' Hardie and MacDonald drafted the fateful and historic resolution in the offices of the *Labour Leader*, to be submitted to the Conference.

This momentous Conference met in the Memorial Hall on 27 February 1900 and the Labour Party was born. A very curious situation arose when the position of Secretary came to be voted upon. MacDonald, although rapidly coming into public notice, was not so well known as another James MacDonald, a tailor, and a Red of the most incarnadine hue, who afterwards became Secretary of the London Trades Council. It has been alleged that many delegates voted for James Ramsay McDonald, the Liberal journalist, under the impression that they were voting for James MacDonald, the Socialist tailor. There was really no opposition to MacDonald for the job; although Keir Hardie admits that the election of secretary was carefully arranged, there is no doubt that MacDonald was the most suitable man for the post by virtue of his ability and enthusiasm. He was one of the non-manual class, and manual workers are snobbish enough to support such a one in preference to one of their own class. Again, he was a Scot, and the English have at times an inferiority complex regarding Scots.

## THIN DAYS IN LONDON

This choice of MacDonald as secretary gave rise to much comment and criticism. H. M. Hyndman gives an interesting estimate of MacDonald as he saw him at that time.

‘As to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald,’ he writes, ‘he is not a man I care to waste much space upon. I have seen a good deal of him at various times, and, when he was chosen as Secretary and became the guiding spirit in the Labour Party, I felt pretty confident as to what line he would adopt. Personal ambition has been his one motive throughout. I do not blame him so much for that. As was said of a far abler and more prominent man, we “did not even object to his having cards up his sleeve; but we felt a little hurt when he solemnly told us they were placed there by Providence.” It has been pretty much the same thing on a lower plane with Ramsay MacDonald. At one time I hoped against hope that circumstances tending towards Socialism, MacDonald would turn in that direction too, as the most direct path to success. But he saw his own interest too clearly to be misled in that way. So up to now, as will shortly be manifest to all, he has been acting as a dangerous enemy to Socialism, while advocating it on the platform and abroad, whenever he felt it was tactically advisable to do so without risking a direct breach with the Liberal Party. Although a good speaker, a fair writer, and a man of considerable dexterity, what has contributed to give him his political position more than anything else is the fact that he alone of all the Labour M.P.’s has had the advantage of a good education, on a higher plane than that of the trade unionists around him. And the opportunity to use this advantage against both them and us—though the trade unionists even now do not see the matter in this light—was his astounding election to the Secretaryship of the non-Socialist Labour Party at its first Conference.’<sup>1</sup>

Undaunted by this criticism, MacDonald, as the new secretary, set to work to organize independent labour and did his task so successfully that fifteen Independent Labour candidates took the field at the next election. Three were elected. MacDonald himself was defeated at Leicester.

<sup>1</sup> *Further Reminiscences*, by Henry Mayers Hyndman.

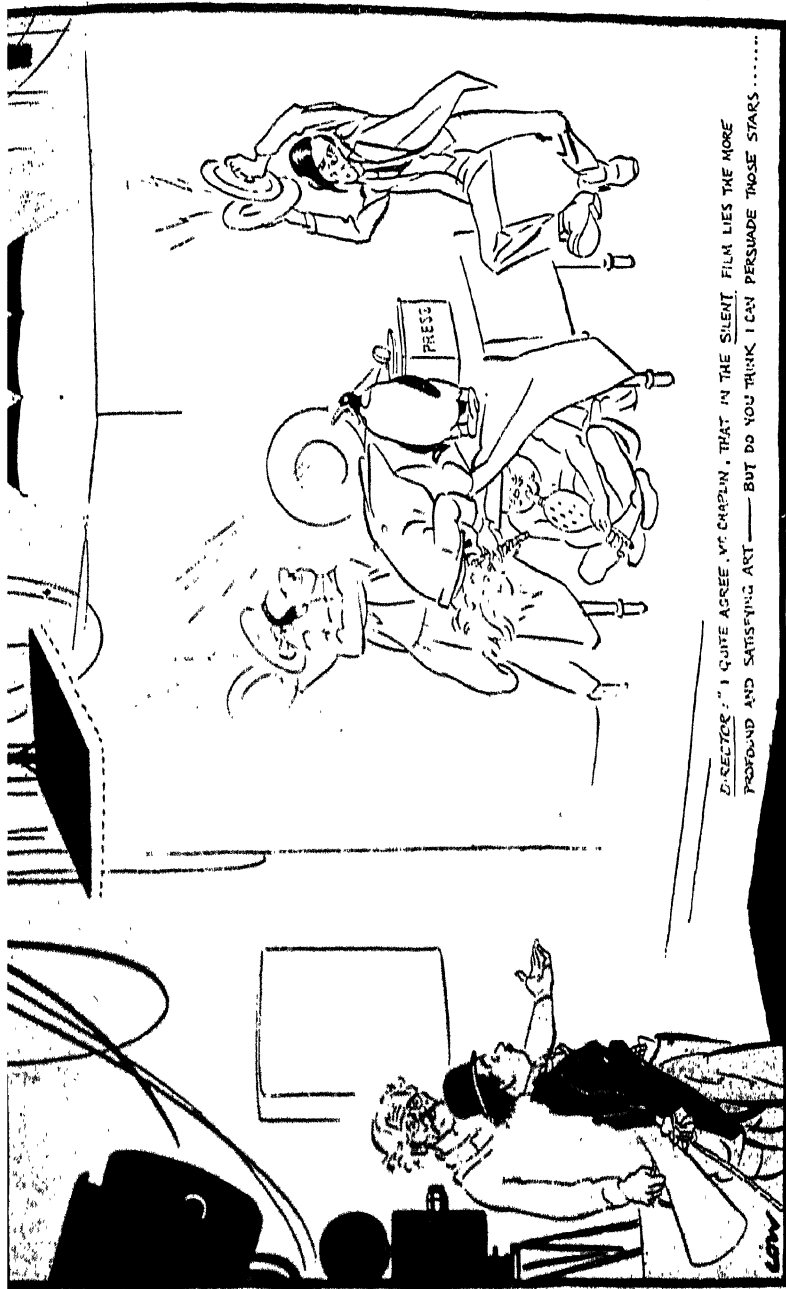
## CHAPTER FOUR

### KEIR HARDIE

**T**he late H. M. Hyndman, the bearded, frock-coated, Cambridge-trained, Socialist recruit from the middle classes, who founded the group of disciples of Karl Marx in this country, which did great pioneering work under the name of the Social Democratic Federation, tells in his book, *Further Reminiscences*, how the revolt began north of the Tweed. 'Scotland,' says Hyndman, 'is by far the best educated portion of the United Kingdom, and it was in Scotland that the Independent Labour Movement began. It is possible on that account that Scotsmen have up to the present day dominated it so completely.'

It was fitting that in May 1887 on land hallowed by memories of the Covenanters' fight for religious liberty, the miners of Ayrshire should hasten to a solemn conventicle, organized by Keir Hardie, to demand political freedom. Hardie, sword in hand, so to speak, sounded a direct challenge to the existing policy. It was in these terms: 'that, in the opinion of this meeting, the time has come for the formation of a Labour Party in the House of Commons, and we hereby agree to assist in returning one or more members to represent the miners of Scotland at the first available opportunity.'

It must be remembered that Keir Hardie was then a member of the Liberal Party. He still believed that the only hope for the amelioration of the lot of the working class was from Liberalism, but his criticism was of the method in which Liberal candidates were chosen. They were chosen in the traditional method, from the wealthy professional and aristocratic classes, and it was utterly impossible for any working man to become a Liberal candidate, unless he were willing to be the paid servant of that Party. Hardie suggested that, when an election came and a Liberal candidate was put forward



DIRECTOR: "I QUITE AGREE, MR. CHAPLIN, THAT IN THE SILENT FILM LIES THE MORE PROFOUND AND SATISFYING ART — BUT DO YOU THINK I CAN PERSUADE THOSE STARS....."

ON THE WESTMINSTER SET.

LOW

## *THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD*

in any constituency for which he (Hardie) had been chosen as the miners' candidate, a plebiscite should be taken between the two men and that the one who got the greater support should go to the poll. 'If the Liberal Association refuses to take this course,' said Hardie, 'working men will then see how much their professions of friendship are worth. I am not anxious to go to Parliament, but I am anxious and determined that the wants and wishes of the working classes shall be made known and attended to there.'

A year passed, and then there occurred an event which, although seemingly unimportant at the time, was destined to become one of the most momentous and historically significant in the political history of this country. There was a by-election in Mid-Lanark. This was a mining constituency, and a chance was presented, therefore, for the Liberal Party to justify its democratic professions by choosing a miner as candidate. There was, besides, a strong feeling in the district that Keir Hardie should be the candidate, and an influential requisition was sent to him, urging him to stand. It was the first time in Scotland that a bona-fide Labour candidate had been put forward. Hardie agreed to stand and put forward his name to the Mid-Lanark Liberal Association for selection. It should be remembered that, although Hardie was a Socialist, he was not proposing to stand as a Socialist, nor, when his modest request was refused and he fought the seat independently, did he stand as a Socialist. In his letter to the Liberal Association, he avowed himself a Radical and a Gladstonian Home Ruler. In his election address, he said :

'I adopt in its entirety the Liberal programme agreed to at Nottingham, which includes Adult Suffrage, Reform of Registration Laws, Allotments for Labourers, County Government, London Municipal Government, Free Education, Disestablishment. On questions of general politics, I would vote with the Liberal Party, to which I have all my life belonged.'

When the Liberals refused his offer and decided to run a young Welsh lawyer, who ultimately became Lord St. Davids, Hardie decided to stand as an Independent Labour candidate.

At this time, Ramsay MacDonald was London secretary,

## KEIR HARDIE

of the Scottish Home Rule Association. In this capacity, he sent Hardie the official good wishes of the Association and a personal letter in the following terms :

‘ I cannot refrain from wishing you God-speed in your election contest. Had I been able to have gone to Mid-Lanark, to help you, to do so by “ word and deed ” would have given me very great pleasure indeed. The powers of darkness—Scottish newspapers with English editors, partisan wire-pullers, and the etceteras of political squabbles—are leagued against us. But let the consequences be what they may, do not withdraw. The cause of Labour and Scottish nationality will suffer much thereby. Your defeat will awaken Scotland and your victory will reconstruct Scottish Liberalism. All success be yours and the National cause your champion. There is no miner and no other one for that matter, who is a Scotsman and not ashamed of it, who will vote against you in favour of an obscure English barrister, absolutely ignorant of Scotland and of Scottish affairs, who only wants to get into Parliament in order that he may have the tail of M.P. to his name in the law courts.’

It will be seen that, at that time, MacDonald too held the view that Liberalism was the true gospel, and his hope was that Hardie’s victory might ‘ reconstruct ’ it rather than replace it by Socialism.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MARRIAGE

When, in 1895, MacDonald was selected as I.L.P. candidate for Southampton, a new influence entered his life. He met and afterwards married Margaret Gladstone. She will always be remembered and honoured, not only for the help and support that she gave MacDonald, but for her own sake, as a virtuous, gracious, self-sacrificing, tender-hearted woman. MacDonald was fortunate in his wife, and, in a Memoir of her, he pays tribute to her character and to her value to him in his early political life.

‘This marriage was,’ says William Blackwood, an old friend of MacDonald, ‘on both sides a true love match. But it made the path to political power easier to the young Scot. It gave him an assured position, exorcized the spectre of poverty that had haunted his earlier years, and enabled him to devote much more of his time to serious politics. His bride, too, was the ideal wife for a politician such as Ramsay MacDonald—a man who became the centre of so many violent and embittered controversies, and who spent himself so lavishly in the service of the cause he had at heart. She shared his hopes and enthusiasm, encouraged him in the midst of difficulties and rebuffs, helped him at every step in his career.’

To be a Socialist in those days required a conspicuous courage; for a member of the middle class to link her life with such an unpopular cause was an act of heroism. Of the common vice of snobbery, she had no trace. Her bold stand for Socialism, though regarded as treason by some of her acquaintances, was a glorious example to timid believers.

Although 1911 had seen MacDonald rise to a high point in his political career, it also brought his deepest suffering.



## MARRIAGE

On 3 February, his little son David died of diphtheria, and, eight days later, MacDonald's mother, to whom he owed so much, died at Lossiemouth. On 23 July, his wife was taken seriously ill at the little country house at Chesham. She was brought to London. Everything that could be done by skill and care was done for her, but in vain. In the autumn, she passed away at the early age of forty-one.

A friend has said :

' She could work until she ached and not be tired. She could fail a hundred times and not be beaten. She could suffer rebuffs and ingratitude, desertion and defeat, and still keep flying the flag of her unconquerable spirit. Her exhaustive knowledge, her acumen, and sunny wisdom were as wonderful as her courage and pertinacity. Who sought her aid without receiving wise direction ? How can it be that this dear indispensable woman should be taken, while the unprized pack of us remain ? Striking her, Death has struck everyone. Quenching and scattering her splendid powers, he has grievously lessened the wealth and glory of the world '

To Margaret MacDonald was due that wonderful organization, the Women's Labour League. On 24 January 1912, at the great Annual Conference of the Labour Party, on the occasion of his retirement from the secretaryship of the Labour Party, a presentation was made to MacDonald of a portrait in oils of himself and his late wife. Keir Hardie, who made the presentation, speaking with emotion, said that he was sure that he would not be misunderstood when he said that he had undertaken the task, at the request of his colleagues on the Executive, with mixed feelings. His feelings would have been mixed in any case, because the retirement of Mr. MacDonald from his official position as Secretary meant something of a break ; but, unfortunately, those feelings had been intensified beyond all power of expression by another break which never could be linked up. In Mrs. Ramsay MacDonald they had had one of those remarkable personalities who by sheer worth — unassuming worth — found her way into the hearts as well as into the minds of all with whom she came into contact.

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‘Mrs. MacDonald,’ he continued, ‘had nothing of the demagogue in any part of her make-up. It was sheer, sweet strength which gave her that wonderful power and that magnificent influence which all of us have more or less felt when in her presence ; and one of the great mysteries of life was that such a nature, so richly gifted and endowed, should have been taken away ere her powers had had time to be utilized to the extent they might.’

It is fruitless to speculate on what might have been if Ramsay MacDonald had had the benefit of the advice and guidance of this noble woman in the years that lay before him.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *MACDONALD LEAVES THE FABIANS*

In the 'Khaki Election' of 1900, MacDonald, who had opposed the Boer War, was defeated at Leicester. The same year he resigned from the Fabian Society as a protest against the policy of the Society with regard to the war. George Bernard Shaw, a prominent member of the Society's Executive, when asked about the resignation, made some interesting comments :

'Even if the Boer War had never occurred,' he said, 'it is now clear that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was right in choosing the Independent Labour Party, which needed him very badly, as his field of action rather than the Fabian Society, in which everything that could be done there was already in efficient hands. It was part of his very remarkable development from the most intractable of frondeurs, always in opposition, to the able and adroit parliamentarian who became the only possible Prime Minister in the Labour Party. Nothing could ever have made a parliamentarian of Keir Hardie.'

What Shaw meant was that MacDonald's intellectual equipment would not gain him any advantage, nor indeed any particular notice, among the 'high-brows' of the Fabian Society, as it was no higher than the average of attainment. Indeed, there were members, such as Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas, Sydney Olivier, and, of course, Shaw himself, with whom MacDonald was not comparable in ability at that time. Among the I.L.P., composed largely of trade unionists, MacDonald would undoubtedly be acclaimed a leader.

That this opinion had some ground can be seen from the evidence of a well-known Trade Union official. Speaking of

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MacDonald's advent among the horny-handed, this official said :

‘ MacDonald was a godsend to us. He came from another world. There he was, putting the things in a beautiful way that we would like to say, but couldn't.’

The comment of Shaw was characteristic in its blunt candour ; there was no room for the ambitious MacDonald in the Fabian Society ; the best places were already taken. As he could not get the first fiddle in the Fabian Orchestra, he seized the big drum in the I.L.P. In the country of the blind the one-eyed is king.

It must not be thought that the Fabian Society made any declaration in support of the Tory Government's war in South Africa. The position was that it refused to take any action at all, because the passing of the resolution which was brought before a meeting of the Society and which condemned the war would have led to the secession of a few members, who, although ‘ patriotic,’ were also popular. ‘ Don't let us lose Hubert Bland,’ said Shaw. ‘ You can't stop the war by passing a resolution,’ said Sidney Webb. ‘ To this resolution, therefore, a shelving amendment was moved---’ the previous question,’ in fact.

Keir Hardie and most of the other anti-war Fabians remained in the Society. There were four resignations of prominent members. Walter Crane was the most consistent of those who left. The other three drifted in various directions—Mrs. Pankhurst into the suffrage fight and finally into the Conservative Party ; J. Fred Green into the National Democratic Party and finally to the staff of the Central Conservative office ; and MacDonald to become Prime Minister.

One strange sequel to the departure of the four stalwarts was seen in 1918, when J. Fred Green became M.P. for Leicester as a supporter of the Lloyd George Coalition Government, defeating Ramsay MacDonald by 14,223 votes.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1906*

**T**he General Election of 1906 saw the triumph of Liberalism—one of the greatest in its long history. The Conservative Government of Balfour had been falling more and more into disfavour. The Cabinet was split, and the nation became more and more tired of the admitted dexterity with which the Prime Minister sought to balance the Protectionists who followed Joseph Chamberlain against the Free Traders who stood with the Duke of Devonshire and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach.

Chamberlain's tariff campaign had reunited the Liberals. In the by-elections they gained seat after seat. Of the remarkable ability, dialectic skill, intellectual brilliance, and charming personality of Balfour there is no question, but his flippancy and reaction turned popular opinion against him. People got tired of 'Pretty Fanny's way.' In 1905 he resigned and went to the country. His policy on what the dominating Chamberlain had made the question of the hour, Tariff Reform, was a masterpiece of ambiguity and the last word in equivocation. He got what he deserved—a humiliating defeat. The Conservatives were returned with 157 out of a total of 670; the Liberals had 376 seats; Labour, fighting for the second time as a separate political entity, had 29 seats; and the Irish Nationalists numbered 83. Not for seventy years had a Prime Minister occupied so strong a position as Campbell-Bannerman. So crushing, indeed, was the defeat in Scotland that it was said that the Scottish Conservatives for their journey to London could have been accommodated in a single first-class carriage.

As the Liberals had a majority of 350, nearly 360, if Labour and Irish support were taken into account, great hopes were entertained that radical change would be forthcoming.

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While Campbell-Bannerman would have gone very far to realize the hopes of progressive enthusiasts, there were members of his Government who were really Whigs, determined to maintain the established order. It is to these men and particularly to Asquith and Grey that the later decline and ultimate extinction of Liberalism is due. At this time, they were conspiring against Campbell-Bannerman, undermining his authority and frustrating his purpose.

Before entering the House of Commons in 1906, MacDonald had been in occasional touch with Keir Hardie. Now he was in daily contact and in close association in the day-to-day work of Parliament. Hardie, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, found MacDonald a clever and industrious secretary. The two men, although Scots, were as the poles apart in character and outlook. MacDonald himself, some years later, has given an excellent word picture of the Socialist pioneer.

‘Everyone,’ he wrote, ‘who came in contact with Hardie felt his personality right away at the outset. His power never lay in his being at the head of a political organization which he commanded ; nor did it lie in his ability to sway the crowd by divine gifts of speech and appeal, for his diction, though beautifully simple, was rarely tempestuous, and his voice had few of the qualities that steal into the hearts of men and stir them in their heights and depths ; more certainly still he never secured a follower by flattery, nor won the ear of a crowd by playing down to it. He set a hard task before his people and gave them great ends to pursue. He left no man in peace in the valley gutter, but winded them on the mountain tracks.

‘What then was the secret of the man ? I who have seen him in all relationships, at the height of triumph and the depths of humiliation, on the platform and at the fire-side, dignified amongst strangers and merry amongst friends, generally fighting by his side, but sometimes in conflict with him, regard that secret as, first of all, his personality and then his proud esteem for the common folk, and his utter blindness to all the decorations of humanity. He was a simple man, a strong man, a gritty man.

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‘ When he raised the flag of revolt in Mid-Lanark, he was a rebel proclaiming civil war ; when he fought the old Trade Union leaders from the floor of Congress, he was a sectary ; when the Independent Labour Party was formed in Bradford, it was almost a forlorn hope, attacked by a section of Socialists on the one hand and by the Labour leaders in power on the other. What days of fighting, of murmuring, of dreary desert-trudging were to follow, only those who went through them know. Through them, a mere handful of men and women sustained the drudgery and the buffetings. Hardie’s dogged—even dour—persistence made faint-heartedness impossible. One has to think of some of these miraculous endurances of the men who defied hardship in the blank wilderness, the entangled forest, the endless snowfield, to get an understanding of the exhaustion of soul and mind and body which had to be undergone between 1890 and 1900, in order to create a Labour Movement. For this endurance Hardie had an inexhaustible inner resource. He knew—

*“ The hills where his life rose,  
And the sea where it goes.”*

Nothing could have been more definite than the contrast between the political outlook of MacDonald and Hardie, the pragmatic opportunism of MacDonald and the uncompromising Socialism of Hardie. These two were, indeed, so different in character and faith that it is strange that they should both be able to come within the confines of one political party. But here, however, the very opportunism of MacDonald, his accommodating expediency, were exercised to permit him to remain unsuspected for many years, among the robust brethren. Hardie was practical, straightforward, downright, and brutally honest ; MacDonald was temporizing, diplomatic, and subtle. Hardie stood for uncompromising independence and no dealings with Liberal or Tory. MacDonald sought all sorts of alliance among his political opponents and friends on the Treasury Bench. Hardie inclined to the Left towards the Socialism of Marx ; MacDonald tended to the Right toward Radicalism. Hardie would wrangle ; MacDonald would wangle. Hardie was outspoken and denunciatory in the House ;

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MacDonald achieved his ends by negotiations behind the Speaker's Chair.

It seems remarkable, in view of subsequent events, that MacDonald's maiden speech in the House should have been in an unemployment debate. Keir Hardie had justly been called the 'Member for the Unemployed,' for he it was who, day in, day out, in season and out of season, annoyed and irritated the Tory and Liberal Members by bringing them face to face with their duty to the workless man. MacDonald was thus following a good example. The occasion of his speech was the Committee of Supply.

John Burns, the first trade unionist to become a Cabinet Minister, had been defending the work of his Department, the Local Government Board, and commenting on the progress made in relief works and farm colonies. Ramsay MacDonald's speech was a reply to the ex-Socialist. MacDonald told the House that he was Chairman of the Central Unemployment Board and spoke of his heart-rending experience in that capacity. He strongly attacked relief works which 'make labour look to artificial means of support, when pressure ought to be used to induce it to look to ordinary economic means of support.'

To this somewhat confused admonition he added another scarcely less clear :

'The moral,' he said, 'is not that there should be no relief work for dealing with exceptional unemployment, but that machinery for dealing with exceptional unemployment should be created before such unemployment has to be faced. What sort of legislation is possible if we wait until we see these miserable processions of men asking for our alms and trying to get at our hearts.'

A feature of this session was the debate on the new Trades Disputes Bill to reverse the Taff Vale decision—a Bill that both the Labour Party and the Liberals were pledged to introduce.

What got to be known as 'Labour Unrest' was growing at this time and was a direct result of the increasing unemployment. The Labour Party held a special Conference in January 1908 at which MacDonald was the principal speaker. He



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pointed out that another unemployment agitation was imminent :

‘To-day I notice,’ he said, ‘that the returns of skilled labour now show 6 per cent unemployed. Honest men, fathers of families, husbands of women who have contracted family responsibilities, who are anxious to fulfil those responsibilities, who by the decree of nature can only fulfil those responsibilities by their being able to find work, and who are this afternoon, while we are conferring here in this conference, tramping about the streets of our industrial towns, are begging literally on their bare knees that the curse passed upon Adam that man must work by the sweat of his brow shall be placed upon them. There is not a Christian in the land who can pronounce the curse upon them and give them an opportunity of living in a decent and independent way. The thought of that spectacle is enough to give every man with a human heart a nightmare feeling.’

This first speech was promising, although its success was in no way sensational. It showed a facility and fluency that developed rapidly later.

The General Election of 1906 was, therefore, one of the most sensational in British history. The new Labour Representation Committee did wonderfully. The votes cast for all parties amounted to 859,518, of which the Committee’s candidates polled 323,195—in other words, 37 per cent of the total. The increase in Labour Representation Committee votes since 1900 was 247,695.

The tactics of the new Labour Party were to concentrate on two-member constituencies in industrial towns. Leicester was just the town where a Socialist of the type of Ramsay MacDonald stood a chance of winning. Although he stood as a Labour candidate, nothing was more unlike the commonly accepted idea of the horny-handed son of toil than this handsome young Scotsman with the beautiful voice and the heart-stirring eloquence. He was on good terms with all classes. He was hand in glove with the Liberals, who, however fiercely anti-Socialist, could find no fault with this gallant Highlander. Highlanders are popular in England. The land question was

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always a topic of keen enthusiasm with the Liberals. The country was just getting worked up for the Lloyd George land campaign. Even English audiences knew all about the Highland Clearances. Did not the sad plight of the Highlander driven from his home by inhuman landlords appeal to their emotional minds? Even Joseph Chamberlain himself exploited the Highland Clearances for purposes of political propaganda, and here was a real Highlander before them, embodying all the romance and pathos of his gallant race. Leicester was a constituency which was ideal for a pioneering effort for Labour. It was a Liberal stronghold.

MacDonald's election address at Leicester was a most illuminating document. It had a little bit for everybody. The zealous Liberal land reformer, and who more zealous than he, would find MacDonald actually uttering a challenge against the hated landlord, and would rejoice. Nor need the most timid Tory fear for his ducats. These conclusions, he is assured, are reached not by a process of working-class experience. Not at all. They rest upon conceptions of right and wrong common to all classes.

*'The greatest work the Labour Party has to do is to compel those conceptions of right and wrong to pass judgment on existing conditions. There is a time for details and definite proposals, and there is a time for general principles which may even be so vague as to be little more than yearnings and aspirations.'*

As long as MacDonald's Socialism was only youthful yearnings and pious aspirations, no Liberal of Leicester need worry.

It was subsequently discovered that he had come to an understanding with the Liberals for their support. He got it, and this had a tremendous effect on his career and conduct thereafter. It is impossible to estimate how much of the political timidity which characterized the twelve years during which he was Member for Leicester was the result of his fear lest he should antagonize or alienate the Liberals. This was, certainly, one of the causes of his tactical moderation and cautious opportunism. His election programme was largely reformist and is interesting as showing the stage of his political pilgrimage to which he had now reached.

The policy of Hardie and MacDonald of uniting the Trade

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Unions into an independent political party was a wonderful success.

‘Within five years,’ MacDonald says, ‘this body has received the support of organizations with a membership approaching one million; five of its candidates have won seats in Parliament; it has accumulated a fund of £7000 from a levy of one penny per annum on its membership; it has placed fifty candidates in the field fully equipped for a General Election. If the Committee were to cease tomorrow, its record of five brief years shows more success in organizing Labour for political purposes and in uniting antagonistic Labour sections than has ever been achieved before.’

MacDonald’s success at Leicester was a direct testimony to that political strategy. The result of the 1906 Election was as much a triumph of Labour as of Liberal. There were four Labour Members in the out-going House of Commons. Fifty Labour candidates went to the poll and twenty-nine were successful.

There is no doubt that what is now known as the Taff Vale Decision played an important part in the success of the Labour candidates. That notorious decision made it legal for any employer who suffered damage through a strike, recognized and supported by a Trade Union, to take action against that Union in a court of law, and, if successful, the Union’s funds were liable to forfeiture. Such injustice united the whole Trade Union Movement in a demand for the immediate amendment of the law. The large support given to Labour candidates is evidence of the resentment that was felt.

One of the first acts of the exultant conference that met after the election was to adopt the name of ‘The Labour Party’ in place of the more cumbrous cognomen.

MacDonald, it must be remembered, did not enter Parliament in 1906 as a Socialist. Through his political life he doubted the policy of making the acceptance of Socialism an essential of membership of the Labour Party. Again and again, year after year at the annual Conferences of the Party, Socialist enthusiasts brought forward resolutions demanding that Socialism be placed in the forefront of Labour Policy, but he consistently opposed it. Even when the demand of a definite

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Socialist declaration of faith on the part of Labour candidates became overwhelming and he, fearful of his own political future if he still resisted, gave a grudging acquiescence, he lost no opportunity of declaring his own personal view. The reason for this was plain. He owed his seat at Leicester to Liberal support. He fully realized that debt, and when, some years later, a vacancy occurred and it was proposed to put up a Labour candidate for the second Leicester seat, he, mindful of his own unstable equilibrium, strongly opposed the candidature. He had his way, but not without some vigorous protests at the subsequent Conference of the Party.

He remained a true disciple of Fabius Cunctator long after he had severed his connection with the Fabian Society. Although Socialism was the 'definite aim' of the Labour Party, that aim, in his view, was not to be attained by a Socialist political party. Socialism was an ideal, remote but alluring. It was, in the meantime, more for a peroration than a programme. When MacDonald had to refer to Socialism in a speech, he was always careful to avoid definition and clarity. His perorations were a mass of picturesque metaphors, a cloud effect—beautiful, but unsubstantial.

Even in his Fabian days, his adoption of this line of policy received a castigation on one occasion. He had spoken of the unwisdom of narrowing down the programme for the democracy by rigid definitions. Hubert Bland, in a speech that followed, ridiculed this attitude.

'It appears,' said Bland, 'that we may work for Socialism, fight for Socialism, even die for Socialism, but, for heaven's sake, don't let us define it!'

A year before he entered Parliament he published a book entitled *Socialism and Society*, which has been the subject of much keen controversy. In it he indulges in a polysyllabic vagueness that degenerates at times into incoherence. Few read it, and it gravitated rapidly into the 'twopenny box.' That was fortunate, as the rank and file of the Labour Party never realized the full significance of MacDonald's Socialist theory or understood its political implications.

At this time Science was a popular subject of conversation in the boarding-houses of Bloomsbury and the *salons*

of Mayfair. Biology, popularized by Huxley and Darwin, and Socialism, popularized by William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, were fine conversation openings. Biology solved the riddle of the past; Socialism showed the promise of the future. MacDonald's book sought to make the best of both worlds. His conception of Socialism was biological; his biology was socialistic. The main idea of MacDonald's economic theory is that Society is not a building that has to be transformed, but a living organism that grows.

One quotation from *Socialism and Society* will, as far as that is possible, not only indicate some vague notion of MacDonald's idea, but incidentally will show why MacDonald had always been the despair of the unfortunate journalist in the Gallery of the House of Commons who has to give a coherent summary of his speeches.

'Biologically,' he writes, 'the negation of the existing state of things, its "inevitable breaking up," its "monetary existence" is impossible. Here we find, as we find everywhere in the Marxian method, a lack of real guarantee (although there are many verbal guarantees) that change is progress. The biological view emphasizes the possibilities of existing society as the mother of future societies, and regards idea and circumstance as the pair from which the new societies are to spring. It gives not only an explanation of the existing state of things, but of its giving birth to a future state of things. It also views every form of existence on its actual process of movement and therefore on its perishing—very different from perishable—side. It lays the very slightest emphasis on its "critical and revolutionary" side, because it is mainly constructive and the idea of "cleaning before building" is alien to its nature. Street improvements are not biological processes.'

Lest the timid might be troubled, he assures them that the Socialist change must be gradual.

'It must proceed in stages, just as the evolution of an organism does. As we approach the Socialist State by the changes in property-holding and in finance, certain things will happen. The weight of economic and social parasitism now preying upon the industrial State will be lightened,

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prices of commodities will fall, the volume of exchange will swell, and the average standard of life will be materially improved. The industrial efficiency of the country will be vastly increased. But the saving which will arise from the destruction of parasitism and Dick Turpinism must be fairly distributed. Some of it will, of course, go to cheapen commodities, and this will at once improve the standard of living at home and increase our efficiency as competitors in foreign markets. But that will not absorb the whole advantage. Both a reduction in working hours and an increase in wages will be possible. Sweating will disappear. Women's cheaply paid labour will no longer compete with men's. Industry will be steadied, and unemployment, as we now know it, will cease. The road to the Socialist State will be opened up.'

Here a little, there a little, never much change at a time.

'Socialism,' he says again, 'marks the growth of society, not the uprising of a class.' Then, after all, the Socialist will not have arrived at his journey's end. Socialism will be the fairy gold at the rainbow's end. It was by this temporizing policy that MacDonald sought to provide a common ground between the Independent Labour Party and the Trade Unions. That Hardie did not fully appreciate the real meaning of MacDonald's opportunism is obvious. He would have denounced it if he had. MacDonald's political strategy was easy and safe, but was surely the last that should be adopted by a Socialist pioneer.

While visiting India with his wife in 1910, MacDonald had to return to England to fight Leicester once more. He won handsomely both then and later in the same year. The number of Labour Members of the independent type in the House increased from 29 to 42, and at the first 1910 General Election the Labour vote showed an increase of 183,506. Labour was moving rapidly forward. The first business of the new House of Commons was the Parliament Bill, a measure to curb the power of the House of Lords. This was a subject after MacDonald's own heart. It was just that kind of academic question on which he could display that dialectic dexterity in debate and readiness in reply that make him such a formidable controversialist.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### WAR

The greatest single event in the political life of MacDonald was his speech in the House of Commons on Monday, 3 August 1914. To get the proper background for that speech and to estimate its importance, it is necessary to recall the circumstances that preceded it.

In 1906 when Campbell-Bannerman took office as Prime Minister of a Liberal Administration, he learned that consultations had been taking place between the general staffs of this country and France, and plans had been prepared to determine the action that might be taken in the event of France being attacked. When Haldane became Minister of War, he was informed by Sir Edward Grey (later Lord Grey of Fallodon) of these conversations, and agreed to continue them. These communications resulted, as they were bound to do, in certain 'honourable commitments' between the two countries, that *in the event of war*, about 100,000 British Troops and 42,000 horse would be sent to France: that the first contingent would land on the third day, 'so that the entire British Army might be on French soil on the fourteenth day.'<sup>1</sup> And moreover, 'the position assigned to our contingent on the French battle-line was marked on the map.' As to the Fleet, as early as 1906 Sir John Fisher and the French Naval Attaché had 'all naval plans prepared.' It was in accordance with this arrangement that France transferred her Fleet to the Mediterranean. These acts definitely and inevitably turned the Entente Cordiale of Edward VII into an alliance between this country and France. Belgium, who was to play such a tragic part in the disaster that followed, was also consulted with regard to what all experts regarded as the imminent and inevitable European War. Negotiations with Belgium had

<sup>1</sup> *British Documents on the Origins of the War.*

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been going on for many years. General Grierson, who was to command the British Expeditionary Force in the German War, had instructed Colonel Barnardiston, British Military Attaché at Brussels, to enter into negotiations with General Ducarne, Chief of the Belgian General Staff, as to the part British troops were to play in the forthcoming war. In 1913 Great Britain and France were seriously considering, in the event of war, forestalling Germany by infringing Belgian neutrality themselves. Plans to land troops on the Continent were ready, worked out in detail.

These plans for co-operative action had to be communicated to Russia, and in due course reached Berlin. It is now known that the military authorities of Germany were well informed as to plans drawn up between French, Belgian, and British officers, for joint military action. It was known, too, in Germany that Sir Henry Wilson as Chief of the Imperial General Staffs had several times visited Belgium and the north of France, to examine probable battlefields and lay down lines of strategy.

The 'honourable' agreement to assist France was, of course, never embodied in a formal alliance, because 'the inner ring of Ministers, soldiers, sailors, officials, and the King' did not dare then to admit what they were doing, to Parliament or even to the Cabinet. They decided—as a memorandum by Lord Sanderson, approved by Sir Edward Grey and King Edward, makes quite clear—not to 'make Parliament aware of the obligations that it was incurring'; they decided also that it 'was not wise to bring the question before the Cabinet'; and they explained all this to the French Ambassador, giving him at the same time personal assurances that 'if France is let in for war with Germany arising out of our agreement with her about Morocco' (the critical question of the moment) 'we cannot stand aside, but must take part with France.'

So with the arrangements of the period 1906-1914. These were not to be divulged. Asquith and Grey, of course, were in the secret, but did not dare to inform Parliament because, firstly, the House of Commons would never approve such an alliance, and secondly, it would be dangerous if Germany got official confirmation that Britain had definitely joined up with her enemies, France and Russia.



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But secrets, especially Foreign Office secrets, have a tendency to leak out. It was impossible that this sensational secret could be kept. In fact it was not. Rumours of certain commitments began to be whispered. The whispers grew louder. At last what was dreaded occurred. A question was asked in the House of Commons. Was there any commitment, unknown to Parliament, which bound us to go to the assistance of France in the event of a war with Germany? To answer honestly would be awkward. Prevarication was the only alternative. Sir Edward Grey, relying on his frigid hauteur to extinguish the questioner, denied that we had any obligations with France. Still more rumours, another awkward question—to Asquith, this time.

During a discussion in the House of Commons on 10 March 1913 Lord Hugh Cecil said :

‘There is a very general belief that this country is under an obligation, not a treaty obligation, but an obligation arising out of an undertaking given in the course of diplomatic negotiations, to send a very large armed force out of this country to operate in Europe.’ The Prime Minister replied : ‘I ought to say that it is not true.’ (1913, *Hansard*, Vol. 50, pp. 42-43.)<sup>1</sup>

The Liberal Cabinet was divided. Churchill declares that three-fourths of them were against intervention in the War. Harcourt, according to Lord Morley’s *Memorandum*, organized the peace section. Asquith has told of the extreme bellicosity of Churchill : ‘Nothing would do him but immediate mobilization.’ He goes on to give an interesting and revealing

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ellis W. Davies, Ex-M.P., a distinguished lawyer, a well-known publicist a member of many Royal Commissions and a witness of unimpeachable reliability, published in December 1937 a remarkable pamphlet entitled : “Our Pre-War Foreign Policy.”

Referring to this incident in the House of Commons, he says :

‘I was present at the debate. I heard the question put and the reply. The answer given by Asquith was much more detailed than appears in *Hansard*. He gave a most emphatic assurance that there was no agreement, verbal or in writing, express or implied, etc., under which such a force was to be sent to the Continent. When war broke out I looked up the answer in *Hansard* and was surprised to find the reply so curtailed. I thought my memory had been at fault, but in 1924 the late C. F. G. Masterman, who was a member of the Cabinet in 1914, without any suggestion from me, repeated Asquith’s answer word for word as he gave it, adding : “I always believed in the old man up to then.”’

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picture of Churchill in these fateful days, as in gentle irony he says :

‘Winston, who has got on all his war paint, is longing for a sea fight in the early hours of the morning, to result in the sinking of the *Goeben*,’ and he adds significantly, ‘the whole thing fills me with sadness.’

‘Grey,’ says Asquith, ‘will, of course, never consent to non-intervention, in any event, and I shall not separate myself from him.’ Again and again the complete subordination of Asquith to Grey is apparent. ‘If Grey goes, of course, I shall go,’ he says. He expected his own party in the House of Commons to break up, as a large number were for absolute non-intervention.

Sir Austen Chamberlain has told the story of how the Tory Leaders forced the hand of Asquith. He relates how the French Ambassador complained to him that the Asquith Government, mainly owing to internal division, were not supporting France in the crisis, and were taking no steps in that direction. Lord Lansdowne, Sir Austen, and some others, sent a remonstrance to Asquith for the purpose of stiffening the resistance of the war section against the peace party in the Cabinet. He tells how Winston kept the Tories posted as to the happenings in the Cabinet. Winston on his own authority had mobilized the Fleet. As far back as Wednesday 29 July 1914, all the ships at Portsmouth had proceeded up Channel—twenty-five miles of ships—was Winston’s phrase, without a word having got into the papers about it.

Morley tells a remarkable story of Cabinet wrangling and intrigues. The main question discussed was the fulfilment of our secret agreement with France. There seemed no chance of reconciling views so fiercely conflicting. John Burns took a very strong stand for peace. Asquith, Haldane, Grey, and Churchill fought hard for intervention. Morley records how, ‘Harcourt this week, two or three times, threw me little slips at the Cabinet Table ; that I must resign is more and more evident.’ ‘One day,’ says Morley, ‘Simon and Lloyd George drove me to lunch at Lord Beauchamp’s. Simon said to me privately that he felt pretty sure of decisive influence over Lloyd George, and that he (Simon) looked to resignation as

quite inevitable. There were present at that important gathering Morley, Beauchamp, Simon, Lloyd George, Harcourt, Herbert Samuel, Pease, McKinnon Wood (not sure about Runciman).<sup>7</sup> The general voice was loud that Burns was right and that the Cabinet should not have passed Grey's language to the French Ambassador.

So the Cabinet from day to day strove for agreement. Not until the last days did the question of Belgium emerge. It must be remembered, however, that most of the Cabinet were ignorant of the fact that whether Belgium were invaded or not, we were bound by our secret agreement to intervene. Grey had made up his mind, Asquith supported him, and in the end the Foreign Secretary had his way.

On Sunday afternoon, 2 August, the dissolution of the Ministry seemed imminent. Hour by hour the majority for peace dwindled. Belgium was the deciding factor that finally converted the peace section. On Sunday evening all but two had capitulated. Lord Morley and John Burns remained unconvinced and resigned office.

While the Cabinet had swung round from neutrality to intervention, the rank and file of the Liberal Party were for the most part against this country becoming mixed up in this quarrel. The issue raised by the violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany had not at that time arisen, and the Radical Anti-Imperialist section was greatly in the majority. Traditionally opposed to Tsarism, they were not at all inclined to become an ally of Russia if war should come. The *Daily News* of Saturday, 1 August 1914 rightly interpreted the views of most Liberals.

There was an important article by Mr. A. G. Gardiner, a former editor and one of the best-known publicists and writers in the London Press. Under the streaming headlines, WHY WE MUST NOT FIGHT, ENGLAND AND THE CRISIS. After this powerful lead there followed a scathing attack on Russia, in which he says :

'If we crush Germany in the dust and make Russia the Dictator of Europe and Asia, it will be the greatest disaster that has ever befallen western culture and civilization.'

The correspondence column of this very important newspaper was full of letters of strong protest against Britain

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intervening in the War. Members of Parliament, well-known publicists and men representing financial, commercial, and industrial interests in the City and the provinces, all protested against Britain intervening in a European War. The Bishop of Hereford wrote to say :

‘ I feel that our Government is in duty bound to keep England strictly neutral.’

The Bishop of Lincoln declared :

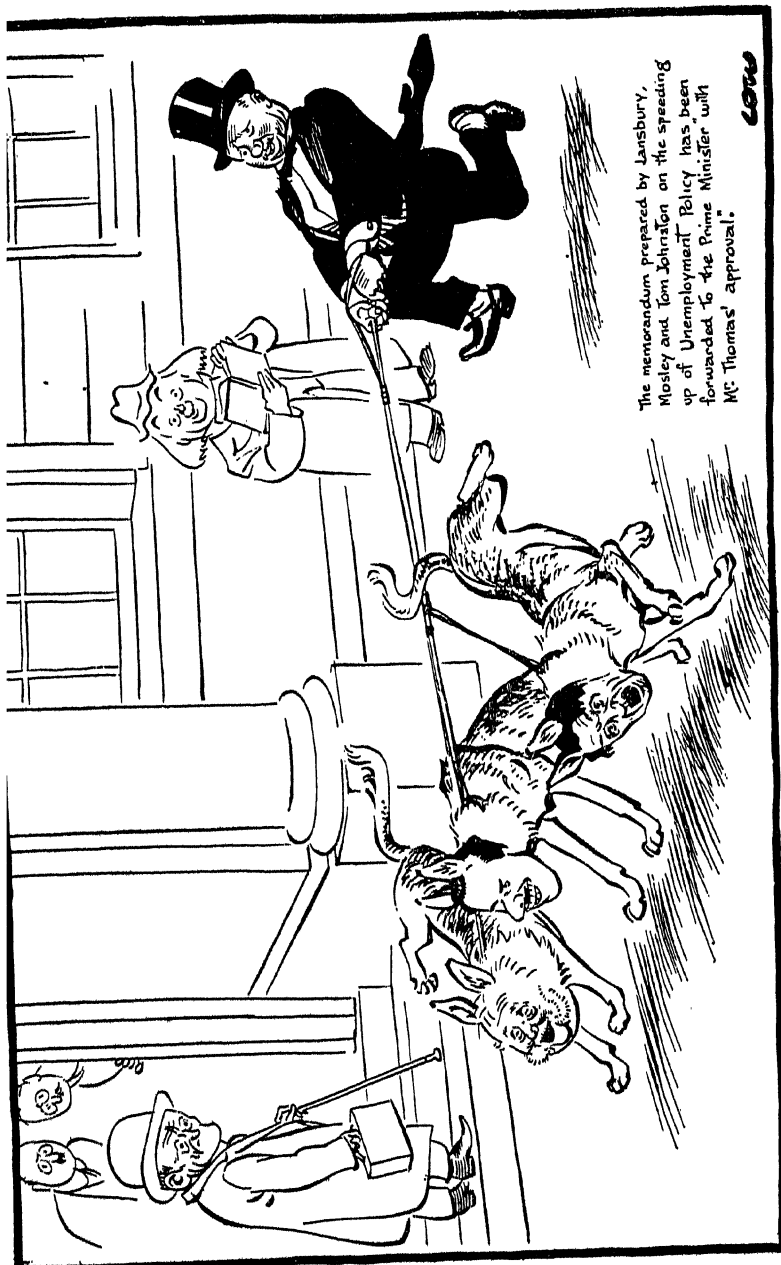
‘ For England to join in the hideous war would be *treason* to civilization and *disaster* to our people. God save us from the war fever !’

MacDonald, as Chairman of the Labour Party, was fully alive to the question of war. The Labour Party had sent Keir Hardie as a delegate to an emergency peace conference at Brussels. Delegates representing the Socialist Parties of all European countries were present. Among those who spoke were Jaurès for France, Vandervelde for Belgium, Haase for Germany, Rubanovitch for Russia, Morgari for Italy, and Keir Hardie for Great Britain. All were united in voicing the desire for peace.

Also as Chairman of the Labour Party, MacDonald had presided over a meeting of the Party on Thursday, 30 July 1914, when the following resolution was passed and forwarded to the Prime Minister :

‘ That the Labour Party is gratified that Sir Edward Grey has taken steps to secure mediation in the dispute between Austria and Serbia, and regrets that his proposal has not been accepted by the Powers concerned ; it hopes, however, that on no account will this country be dragged into the European conflict in which, as the Prime Minister has stated, we have no direct interest, and the Party calls upon all Labour Organizations in the country to watch events vigilantly so as to oppose if need be in the most effective way any action which may involve us in war.’

On Sunday, 2 August, the British section of the Socialist International held a striking demonstration in Trafalgar Square, London, when the call for peace was emphasized and



The memorandum prepared by Lansbury, Mosley and Tom Johnston on the speeding up of Unemployment Policy has been forwarded to the Prime Minister with Mr. Thomas' approval.

LOW

JEAMES TAKES THE ALSATIANS FOR A RUN.

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the demand for British neutrality in the event of a Continental outbreak, was strongly urged.

MacDonald did not attend.

The position inside the Labour Party was not so harmonious as appeared on the surface. There was—indeed there had always been—two sections, one of the Right, inclined towards a progressive Liberalism, more Radical than Socialist. This came later to be called Gradualism. The other was definitely on the Left, more Socialist than Radical. MacDonald led one section, Keir Hardie the other. Although there was strong antagonism behind the scenes, even hostility between these two leaders, it never reached the stage of an actual open breach. MacDonald had never any doubt as to where exactly Keir Hardie stood on the question of War and Peace. Keir Hardie had all his life been a strenuous advocate of peace and international co-operation between the workers of the world, and sought to extend and consolidate the International Socialist and Labour Congress into a Socialist League of Nations. On the other hand, Keir Hardie had often to complain that he never knew where MacDonald stood on the War.

As has been told, the Liberals had long been sharply divided on Imperialism, Armaments, and Peace. One section, the Imperialists, were Liberals of the Right, almost indistinguishable from progressive Conservatives. This section contained Asquith, Grey, and Haldane. The other section was led by Lloyd George and associated with him at that time, strangely enough, was Winston Churchill.

The antagonism between the Asquith-Grey section on the one hand and the Lloyd George coterie on the other, began very early in Lloyd George's parliamentary career. Like most Liberals he was opposed to the South African War. This brought him into opposition to Asquith and Grey who were strong in its support. Very courageously he denounced the Boer War in an extraordinary series of meetings in different parts of the country, and often at great sacrifice to himself, and indeed great personal danger. This antagonism between Asquith and Lloyd George increased later to a definite split, which ultimately destroyed the Liberal Party.

MacDonald had sought associations with both sections, but

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his friendliness with the Imperialist section of the Liberal Party did not extend to its leaders, Asquith and Grey. As far as Asquith and Grey recognized MacDonald's existence at all, they were implacably opposed to him. They both treated him with scorn and contempt.

At the outbreak of war, Lloyd George was one of the most popular men in the country. His brilliant oratory and great parliamentary gifts had given him a position of honour and distinction in public life. He had risen rapidly and there was no doubt that he would go far. It was a keen appreciation of this fact that led MacDonald to associate with the young and promising statesman. This close association of MacDonald with his political opponents was quite unknown to the rank and file of the Labour Party. Had it been known it would have been keenly resented. Indeed, it was to prevent this sort of thing that the Labour Party was formed. These affiliations, as far as they were known, were strongly deprecated. At an annual conference of the Labour Party held in Glasgow, MacDonald was very sharply criticized for his associations with Liberals. One speaker offered strong objection to MacDonald having accepted nomination as a member of the Indian Public Services Commission. No doubt MacDonald would do good work in India, but he objected to his running away abroad while there was so much to be done at home. Eighteen years later Winston Churchill made the same criticisms in language more picturesquely descriptive and more personally offensive.

It must be remembered that MacDonald had always had these affiliations in all the political parties. Besides Lloyd George, he was in close touch not only with Haldane, Morley, and Sir John Simon, but with Fisher and Balfour.

On that fateful Sunday when Europe was on the brink of war, a very revealing and significant incident, which had far-reaching consequences, occurred. A party of notable persons met at lunch to discuss the critical situation especially with regard to its political implications. They were Lloyd George, Sir John Simon, the late Charles Masterman, George Lambert, and Ramsay MacDonald. They were fully aware of all the facts known to the Cabinet and could therefore discuss the situation with adequate information. They were

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all agreed in denouncing Grey. They felt that the Foreign Secretary, and indeed Mr. Asquith himself, had grossly misled the country as to the real relationship with France, and felt that they had been presented with a *fait accompli* and were approaching a grave decision with their hands tied by these secret foreign commitments. They were all of the anti-Grey section, believing, as one of them put it, that the Foreign Secretary was a mere lath painted to look like iron.

MacDonald and Lloyd George had always believed that Grey, despite his air of pompous superiority, was in fact a man of straw.

Sir John Simon, although he had all along been opposed to Britain intervening in a Continental dispute, gave it as his considered opinion that if Germany invaded Belgium this country could not remain neutral. This was the opinion of all who sat there. MacDonald was particularly emphatic that Britain could not keep out if Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium. This is important in view of MacDonald's subsequent conduct.

Sunday, 2 August 1914, was a day of crisis. There was a feeling everywhere of great events just about to happen. Although the actual happenings were not known, there was an all-pervading atmosphere of excited anticipation. It is easy to picture the mind of the imaginative MacDonald reacting to these tremendous circumstances. He must have watched throughout the day the growing excitement and sensed the tightening tension. He must have known that he, too, was facing a crisis in his career. The one fact that became more and more insistent on his mind was that next day he would be called upon, as Leader of the Labour Party, to take part in the most stupendous single event that the British House of Commons had ever witnessed. He knew of the imminence of war. It had come to his knowledge that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary regarded the declaration of war against Germany as only a question of hours. Four great armies were waiting eagerly the word to move; the last messages were passing between the diplomatists. The centre of interest was about to move from the secrecy of the chancellery in Downing Street to the publicity of the Parliamentary forum in the Palace of Westminster.



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Within twenty-four hours his duty it would be to play a part in epic drama. He would be called upon to make a responsible pronouncement on behalf of millions of the working classes of this country. The theme, the place, and, above all, the occasion gave that speech a supreme importance. It would be the greatest moment of his life. In view of that, he realized that he must make a decision which in any event would be historical, but might either make or mar his future career.

MacDonald hesitates because his Celtic imagination conjures up before his mind's eye all the dreadful consequences of decision. This faculty of visualizing the future MacDonald may have inherited from his maternal grandmother who is said to have possessed that uncanny power, 'second sight.' At any rate, his habit of brooding introspection may account for that weak indecision, that extreme of caution, which sometimes came close to cowardice. Yet within twenty-four hours he must make a speech in the hearing of the world. What line should he take? Ambition stirs him. Imagination runs riot. Up before his fancy rises the picture of the House of Commons. He sees himself holding the House spellbound and making a speech that men in days to come will quote with admiration and respect. He would make history. As a diligent student of the orator's art, he had known that many of the classic orations had been made on this great question of Peace or War. He knew by heart the purple patches in most of them—John Bright's 'Angel-of-Death' speech, Chatham on the American War, and Lincoln's Gettysburg masterpiece. These had been his models for years; he had from boyhood wished to emulate them, but never until now had he had the opportunity of a great occasion. Now was the chance of a lifetime to realize the ambition of the orator and command the applause of the listening senate. In his peculiar but constant habit of dramatizing himself, of seeing himself as some great historical figure, he determined that this oration would put him in the class of Demosthenes, Cicero, Pitt, Bright, and Burke.

Then a doubt dims the picture. There is danger in associating himself definitely with the War Party. Would the War be popular? He had himself spoken of the mob as proverbially

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fickle, swung hither and thither with the emotion of the moment. A war popular to-day may not be so to-morrow. The people always support a war at the time. 'Through the ages the throb of the war-drum has always been alluring and compelling. He had said :

'At that outset of war it is roses, roses all the way. It has ever been so, and it is so now. The youths in the street are gay. Ministers are cheered. Those who stand for peace are hooted. A thoughtless buoyancy is like a spring-time in the hearts of the street crowds. All this will change. The wind and the rain will come, and the gay spring flowers will be broken and bedraggled.'

MacDonald knew that, a few hours before, a great mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square had called for Peace, and he had also just seen the excited crowd massing in Whitehall as he passed through and crying in the street for war. The crowd is always unstable. If he followed the crowd now and popular opinion afterwards changed, where would he be? A wrong estimate might cost him his seat at Leicester. No, he must leave a way out. His support must not be too definite. On the other hand, he recalled the resolution of the Labour Party calling for non-intervention. He was Chairman of the Labour Party. If he were to interpret their view accurately, he must go wholeheartedly for peace and for Britain remaining neutral. In this he knew that probably the majority of the Liberals would support him. If he did anything else he would undoubtedly lose his leadership of the Labour Party. This morbid foreboding was busy again. If he made a definite stand against war, he would have the Tories against him to a man, and also the most influential Liberals in the Cabinet, led by Asquith and Grey. That is to say, to advocate neutrality would bring the most formidable elements in Parliament united against him; and he saw that, for the time being at any rate, they would swing the mob. They would be the more powerful and popular side. This determined his conduct, as it determined his action in every crisis in his life. He saw that the balance was in favour of supporting the War. Yet as he visualized Grey making his speech in the House next day, another element emerged. He had always had a strong

antipathy towards Grey, and, indeed, towards Asquith too. He knew, too, that there was a strong personal antagonism towards Grey among the Radical section of the Liberal Party. Grey was disliked personally because of his haughty aloofness and politically because of his Imperialist tendencies.

MacDonald could forecast just the kind of speech that Grey would make. He had had eight years to study his style. As Grey would be following Conservative policy, he knew that Bonar Law would support him in his speech. Redmond, too, would bring the Irish Party in support of the Government. If MacDonald's speech was to be dramatic, it must be different. Torn between conflicting views, fearful misgivings and morbid imaginings, he saw that there was but one way out. The easy way of compromise was the way of safety. He would avoid the choice of alternatives by taking both. He would so speak as to give general support to the policy of the Government in standing by an endangered Belgium and a threatened France. He would thus vindicate his patriotism. But he would salve his conscience by attacking Grey. He saw the dramatic possibilities of an impeachment. Why not follow the classic example and deliver a philippic against Grey as Cicero did against Clatiline? He would denounce the Foreign Secretary's policy of secret diplomacy, entangling alliances and militant imperialism. His attitude towards Belgium and France would conciliate the Conservatives, his attack on Grey would delight Lloyd George, Sir John Simon, and the Radicals, and his denunciation of Liberal diplomacy would be a sop to the Labour Cerberus.

So he made his decision. So he planned his speech. It was a hybrid product, born of his fears, his ambitions and his hopes. There would be something in it for everybody.

The scene in the House of Commons on that fateful day, Monday, 3 August 1914, was one of tense excitement. The House of Commons met in an anxious mood. It was crowded. Indeed, never had it been so full. There was not enough room on the benches, so that chairs were brought in and a narrow gangway was left for Members to get their usual places. The galleries were crammed, the lobbies were crowded, and great crowds waited outside for news.

The first business of the day had direct relation to the

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crisis. It was to proclaim the moratorium of three days to enable the banks to make their arrangements to meet the new developments. When Sir Edward Grey was seen to rise, a great shout of cheering rose from the Conservative benches. Some sprang to their feet and shouted 'Hear! Hear! Hear! Hear!' Many waved their handkerchiefs. The gravity of his demeanour, however, silenced the applause before he had spoken a word. Very slowly, very seriously, very solemnly, he began his speech. There was a sudden, strange stillness in that great assembly, as the solemnity of his manner was seen. His audience sobered in sympathy. His words were well chosen, and his voice carried clearly to the remotest listener. Such an occasion would have exalted any speech. The audience no doubt realized that issues of life and death lay behind its studied restraint. Nor did the speech lose anything either from the personality of the speaker or the manner of his advocacy. Indeed, the aquiline features of Sir Edward Grey, his air of supreme gravity, and the austerity of his words added a sense of power to a calm dignity. He sought none of the sources of popular approval. He used neither passion nor sentiment. Yet he moved that great assembly with the force and intensity of a great humanitarian appeal. With most of his audience he accomplished his object. He almost succeeded in giving his policy and purpose the appearance of inexorable fate. It was to this speech, worthy to rank as one of the great orations of the British Parliament, that MacDonald referred later in terms of contemptuous disparagement. 'Its argument,' he said, 'could be *brushed aside*.'

Mr. Bonar Law, speaking for the Conservatives, and Mr. John Redmond, speaking for the Irish Nationalists, responded to Grey's appeal with ready assurances. Redmond made a moving speech, having evidently been strongly touched by Grey's reference to Ireland as being the 'one bright spot.' The Tories cheered the Irish orator lustily.

It was in this electric atmosphere and in a House deeply moved that MacDonald rose to deliver the speech of his life. No cheers greeted his uprising, but there were sullen mutterings which grew to definite hostility before he sat down. He said :

'I should, had circumstances permitted, have preferred to remain silent this afternoon. But circumstances do not

permit of that. I shall model what I have to say on the two speeches we have listened to, and I shall be brief. The right hon. gentleman, to a House which in a great majority is with him, has delivered a speech the echoes of which will go down in history. The speech has been impressive ; but, however much we may resist the conclusion to which he has come, we have not been able to resist the moving character of his appeal. I think he is wrong. I think the Government which he represents and for which he speaks is wrong. I think the verdict of history will be that they are wrong. We shall see. The effect of the right hon. gentleman's speech in this House is not to be its final effect. There may be opportunities or there may not be opportunities for us to go into details, but I want to say to this House, and to say it without equivocation that, if the right hon. gentleman had come here to-day and told us that our country is in danger, I do not care what Party he appealed to, or to what class he appealed, we would be with him and behind him. If this is so, we will vote him what money he wants. Yes, and we will go further. We will offer him ourselves if the country is in danger. But he has not persuaded me that it is. He has not persuaded my hon. friends who co-operate with me that it is, and I am perfectly certain that, when his speech gets into cold print to-morrow, he will not persuade a large section of the country. If the nation's honour were in danger, we would be with him. There has been no crime committed by statesmen of this character without those statesmen appealing to their nation's honour. We fought the Crimean War because of our honour. We rushed to South Africa because of our honour. The right hon. gentleman is appealing to us to-day because of our honour. There is a third point. If the right hon. gentleman could come to us and tell us that a small European nationality like Belgium is in danger, and could assure us that he is going to confine the conflict to that question, then we would support him. What is the use of talking of coming to the aid of Belgium, when, as a matter of fact, you are engaging in a whole European War, which is not going to leave the map of Europe in the position it is in now ? The right hon. gentleman said nothing about Russia. We want to know about that. We want to try to

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find out what is going to happen, when it is all over, to the power of Russia in Europe, and we are not going to go blindly into this conflict without having some sort of a rough idea as to what is going to happen. Finally, so far as France is concerned, we say solemnly and definitely that no such friendship as the right hon. gentleman describes between one nation and another could ever justify one of those nations entering into war on behalf of the other. If France is really in danger, if, as the result of this, we are going to have the power, civilization, and genius of France removed from European history, then let him say so. But it is an absolutely impossible conception which we are talking about to endeavour to justify that which the right hon. gentleman has foreshadowed.'

When MacDonald sat down, there was no applause. To most of his hearers the speech was an irritating bewilderment. What did it mean? What was behind those involved, high-sounding sentences? Was MacDonald for the War or against it? Should Britain intervene or not? Some phrases in the speech seemed to indicate that Britain should intervene to protect Belgium and France. Some sentences seemed to suggest leaving them to their fate by our maintaining neutrality. Did this mean that the Labour Party was for or against neutrality? Thus Members argued, puzzled and resentful. Most of them did not appreciate the significance of the speech. There were others and several of them in the Government who knew that MacDonald had privately expressed definite views on intervention, and they were not only reproachful but angry. They recognized that, on the vital question the only urgent question, what this country should do at once, MacDonald was indefinite and non-committal. They condemned MacDonald because they believed that this ambiguity was intentional and deliberate. They could see that MacDonald was shirking the issue. To ride two horses at once demands skill and dexterity. The horse 'Censure' bolted; the horse 'Approval' fell. The result was confusion. A feeling of disgust became widespread, as Members studied the speech at their leisure.

MacDonald knew that his speech was a failure; he had

instinctively sensed it in the House. It did not need the angry interruptions that broke in while he was speaking, or the sullen silence in which he sat down, to inform him that he had blundered. He had overreached himself. Yet he had expected approbation from all Parties, except Sir Edward Grey himself. He had carefully prepared his speech to that end. Now he knew that he had stressed the wrong thing. He had really intended to commend the War, while criticizing Grey. If he believed that war was inevitable and that we had to go through with it, as he said so often afterwards, then he was guilty of treachery by trying to rob the soldier of the devotion and enthusiasm that comes from the knowledge that he is fighting for a high purpose, a good cause. MacDonald took away from the recruit the moral appeal of a 'quarrel just.' How could men be expected to volunteer to face the horrors of war at the behest of a gang of bungling plotters called diplomatists? Whatever truth there was in his indictment of the pre-war diplomacy of Grey, that was no time for raking up the past. Nobody is more obnoxious than the person who says : 'I told you so.'

It is commonly believed that, on that great day, MacDonald alone struck a critical note. This is not so. MacDonald's speech was followed by many which pleaded whole-heartedly for neutrality. Indeed, it was Keir Hardie and Ponsonby who made the most courageous speeches on that occasion. MacDonald's is conspicuous as being the first, but that was due to his being a Party leader.

The days that followed MacDonald's speech in the House were days of misery for him. He was ostracized in the House. Several of his colleagues in the Parliamentary Labour Party repudiated the speech. He got a bad 'Press' next day. He was disappointed, distressed, and humiliated. He could not help contrasting the great praise in the newspapers of the Foreign Secretary's speech with their contemptuous comments on his own. This stirred anew his bitter personal animosity against Grey, which grew until it became a morbid obsession.

So much did this 'hidden hatred' possess him that, a few days after his speech in the House, he wrote an article to the *Labour Leader*, the organ of the I.L.P., in which he charged

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Grey and Asquith with dishonesty in deliberately misleading the House of Commons :

‘ When Sir Edward Grey,’ he wrote, ‘ failed to secure peace between Germany and Russia, he worked deliberately to involve us in the War, using Belgium as his chief excuse. I come back to the statement which I think I have clearly proven—that the European War is the result of the existence of the Entente and the Alliance, and that we are in it in consequence of Sir Edward Grey’s foreign policy. Our Government supplied the idealism for this War by telling us that the independence of Belgium had to be vindicated by us. It was a pretty little game of hypocrisy, which the magnificent valour of the Belgians will enable the Government to hide up for the time being. Want is in our midst, and Death walks with Want. And when we sit down and ask ourselves with the fulness of knowledge “ Why has this evil happened ? ” the only answer we can give is, because Sir Edward Grey has guided our foreign policy for the past eight years. So anxious was Germany to confine the limits of the War that the German Ambassador asked Sir Edward Grey to propose his own conditions of neutrality, and Sir Edward Grey declined to discuss the matter. This fact was suppressed by Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith in their speeches in Parliament. Both withheld the full truth from us. Had this been told us by Sir Edward Grey, his speech could not have worked up a war sentiment. The hard, immovable fact that Sir Edward Grey had so pledged the country’s honour, without the country’s knowledge, to fight for France or Russia that he was not in a position even to discuss neutrality.’

MacDonald’s hostility to Grey at this time seemed to override his instinctive caution, and, in a descriptive Parliamentary article which he wrote to the *Leicester Pioneer*, he made a statement which was widely quoted in the Press and was one of the most outspoken and unequivocal statements that he had ever made in his life. He referred to Sir Edward Grey’s speech as one which, ‘ though it received the cheers of the vast majority of the House of Commons on Monday, will be weighed against *the lives of the men who will be sacrificed because of*



it, and it will be dust and ashes, prejudice and error and nothing more.'

It was, however, when he referred to the cause of the War that he made the extraordinary declaration :

'There is no doubt whatever but that, when all this is over and we turn back to it in cold blood and read it carefully so as to ascertain why England has practically declared war on Germany, we shall find that the only reason from beginning to end in it is that the Foreign Office is anti-German and that the Admiralty was anxious to seize any opportunity of using the Navy in battle practice.'<sup>1</sup>

These articles were referred to in *The Times* in October 1916 in a letter of strong protest from Sir Valentine Chirol. He alleges that the gross charges made by MacDonald afford just the materials for bolstering up German propaganda, the chief aim of which was to represent Britain as the villain of the piece.

'Is it mere coincidence,' he says, 'that, following Mr. MacDonald's lead, the whole German Press has concentrated upon Sir Edward Grey? There is scarcely an important German paper which has not reproduced Mr. MacDonald's manifesto in part or in whole to justify its own diatribes against England. In time of actual war—the most terrible war in which we have ever been engaged—Mr. MacDonald has sought to besmirch the reputation of his country by openly charging with disgraceful duplicity the Ministers who are its chosen representatives, and he has helped the enemy State—and helped it not unsuccessfully—to poison against his country the wells of public opinion, not only in Germany, but in neutral States whose attitude towards Great Britain might at any moment materially and decisively affect the issue of the War. Such action oversteps the bounds of even the most excessive toleration and cannot be properly or safely disregarded by the British Government or the British people.'

These attacks on Sir Edward Grey were made at a time when MacDonald was smarting under a sense of disappoint-

<sup>1</sup> *Leicester Pioneer*, 8 August 1914.

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ment, of frustration, and in a passion of envious, personal hostility. They were all made in the first days of the War. They were instantly regretted when his sudden anger subsided and his characteristic prudence took control. But they were not forgiven and made MacDonald at the time the best hated man in Britain. Like Job, 'the thing that he had feared had come upon him.' Like Milton's Lucifer

*'He hears  
On all sides, from innumerable tongues,  
A dismal universal hiss, the sound  
Of public scorn.'*

No man was less able to stand up against unpopularity than he. There were, however, remarkable reactions. The Socialists, and particularly the I.L.P., hailed him as a hero, willingly sacrificing himself on the altar of duty at the call of conscience. The Liberals, even the Radicals, believed that he had gone too far in his bitter denunciation of Grey, who was, after all, a notable leader of their Party. The Conservatives denounced him as a traitor and a pro-German. His position, therefore, was one of great difficulty. At all hazards, he must retain his close connection with the I.L.P. Indeed, it was as a member of the I.L.P. that he stood as candidate and Member of Parliament at Leicester. He fought his Parliamentary elections under its auspices, and it contributed most of the expenses. He had for many years held high office in the I.L.P. and had once been Chairman. Year by year he had been put forward and elected to the post of Treasurer of the Labour Party as a nominee of the I.L.P.

He resolved to keep the flame of loyalty to himself burning during this period of unpopularity, by addressing meetings under I.L.P. auspices. This demanded a definite and distinct kind of speech. These enthusiastic Left-wingers clamoured for a 'hot number.' MacDonald had to be most cautious. He only spoke in carefully selected places and was very guarded in what he said. Scotland was pretty safe, particularly Glasgow. His audiences there were more extreme than elsewhere. He could say anything he liked there, as his meetings were ignored by the capitalist Press. He could not, however, do the impossible; several times a reporter managed to slip

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into these meetings and report some glaring indiscretion in his speech. His retort was the usual one. He blamed the journalists. He had been misreported. He had not said what the Press had said he said, and, even if he had, it did not mean what they said it meant. At any rate, these were hack journalists, scribblers in the pay of the capitalist Press-lords. How could a Socialist expect fair play from them? This defence worked both ways, as, when any reference in the Press was made to MacDonald's pro-war sentiments, his faithful followers denounced it as a capitalist canard.

The violent Press attack after his Leicester letter alarmed MacDonald. Every newspaper he opened denounced him as a traitor. His impeachment of Grey was quoted again and again against him and wrongly construed to mean that he was against the War. What particularly alarmed him was the opposition that was being strongly organized against him in his own constituency. Even in ordinary times, his hold on the double-member constituency of Leicester was precarious. No one knew better than he that he only held it by the goodwill of the Liberals. He realized with dismay that, unless he took prompt action to meet this attack, he might be driven from Parliament altogether and his career ruined.

A great recruiting meeting was being organized at the De Montford Hall in Leicester in September 1914. Here was his opportunity to vindicate his patriotism. When the Mayor, who presided, announced that he had received a letter from Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald that was too long to read, immediately there were loud cries from all parts of the building. 'Read it!' cried some. 'Burn it!' cried others. The scene recalled the incident in the Roman Forum when Mark Antony waved the will of Cæsar in the face of the Roman mob. Ultimately, the Mayor read the letter, which was as follows :

' My dear Mr. Mayor, I am very sorry indeed that I cannot be with you on Friday. My opinion regarding the causes of the War are pretty well known, except in so far as they have been misrepresented ; but we are in it. It will work itself out now. Might and spirit will win, and incalculable political and social consequences will follow upon victory. Victory therefore must be ours. England is not played out. Her

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mission is to be accomplished. She can, if she would, take the place of esteemed honour among the democracies of the world, and, if peace is to come with healing on her wings, the democracies of Europe must be her guardians. There must be no doubt about this. Well, we cannot go back now, nor can we turn to the right or the left. We must go straight through. History will in due time apportion the praise and the blame, but the young men of the country must, for the moment, settle the immediate issue of victory. Let them do it in the spirit of the brave men who have crowned our country with honour in the times that are gone. Whoever may be in the wrong, men so inspired will be in the right. The quarrel was not of the people, but the end of it will be the lives and liberties of the people. Should an opportunity arise to enable me to appeal to the pure love of country—which I know is the precious sentiment in all our hearts, keeping it clear of thoughts which I believe to be alien to real patriotism—I shall gladly take that opportunity. If need be, I shall make it myself. I want the serious men of the Trade Union, the Brotherhood, and similar movements, to face their duty. To such men it is enough to say "England has need of you"; to say it in the right way. They will gather to her aid. They will protect her, and, when the war is over, they will see to it that the policies and conditions that make it will go like the mists of a plague and the shadows of a pestilence. Yours very sincerely, J. Ramsay MacDonald.'

As the I.L.P. had denounced recruiting, this action of MacDonald was in direct opposition to its policy. Only a very few, however, knew anything of this letter until many years afterwards, when it was unearthed by the Communists in an anti-MacDonald campaign. Had its existence been known to the Labour Movement generally, the whole career of MacDonald might have been different.

MacDonald felt, however, that that act of associating himself with the War Party as far as recruiting was concerned was not enough. He determined to do something more spectacular that would confound those who impugned his patriotism. How could one show his wholehearted support of the War

better than by volunteering to fight in it himself? Now it happened that a friend of his, the very well known and popular Dr. Hector Munro, was at that time doing heroic work in Belgium. MacDonald actually went to Belgium to join Dr. Munro's Ambulance Section. But the hostility caused by his attack on the Foreign Secretary had preceded him there and had an immediate and ludicrous result. He had just arrived at Dr. Munro's headquarters when an urgent call took the doctor away, and MacDonald was left alone. When Dr. Munro returned, MacDonald was nowhere to be seen. On inquiry, Dr. Munro discovered that two soldiers had come and promptly arrested the new recruit. On going to headquarters, Dr. Munro was informed that the Belgian officer in command had received instructions from British Headquarters to arrest MacDonald at once and send him back to England. To save his friend the humiliation of being taken to the coast in the custody of an armed guard, Dr. Munro offered to be responsible for MacDonald, to take him to the coast in his own car, and see him safely on the boat for England. The Belgian officer agreed, after some discussion. Dr. Munro then relieved the escort of their prisoner. He took MacDonald in safety to the coast and saw him off to England.

The ignominy of this affront hurt MacDonald keenly. To be arrested in this public way, to be sent back in disgrace to England, was surely the depths of humiliation. On his arrival in London, he set to work to re-establish himself. He knew several people in official circles, and through their influence he obtained an interview with Lord Kitchener. MacDonald so convinced that famous soldier of his patriotic bellicosity that he gave him an 'omnibus' red pass that would have taken him anywhere in the War area. He returned to France in triumph, but never again offered himself for service. Not the least noteworthy aspect of this incident is the amazing ingratitude of MacDonald towards Dr. Munro, who was ostracized and cruelly victimized for his kindly act of friendship towards one who was regarded, at the time, as the enemy of his country.

Amid all the tangle of ambiguities of his later speeches, it is almost impossible to find out what was MacDonald's real belief about the War. He never took the risk

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as did Hardie, Snowden, and Ponsonby of absolute pacifism.

‘The War has broken out,’ he said ; ‘we are in it. We must see it through. *Every step to that necessary end must be taken.* Let there be no mistake about that.’

‘When a war is actually upon us,’ he wrote, ‘when our friends are dying in the trenches and being mown down on the battlefields ; when Europe is in the melting-pot and our own country is not quite safe from attack, a set of problems different from those which faced us at the outbreak of the War have to be dealt with.’<sup>1</sup>

Whether the pacifist view was right or wrong, MacDonald had never taken it. The genuine pacifist and the conscientious objector believed that it was wrong to go to war. Any war is wrong, every war is wrong, and that wrong is increased every hour the war continues. Stop the war at once is their plea ; appeal to the sense of moral justice of the world. This was not MacDonald’s view. He condemned the diplomacy of the pre-war years, but once the first shot was fired his position was that now we were in it we must see it through. His opinion of Grey and his diplomacy was shared at the time by Mr. Lloyd George, Sir John Simon, and many other Liberals who supported the War.

The Labour Party itself, although officially supporting the War, had likewise condemned the policy of Grey and Asquith. But the Labour Party’s position towards the conduct of the War was consistent. Like MacDonald, they believed that now the War was on the country must see it through, but, unlike him, they saw that it was no use raking up the past misdeeds of the Foreign Minister. Their attitude meant an open breach with MacDonald, and he forestalled any disciplinary action they might take by resigning his office of Chairman.

He depended for his political existence at that time upon the Independent Labour Party, the Left Wing of the Labour Party. This meant that he had to play up to them at his meetings. To them he was an out and out, stop-the-war Socialist, victimized for his courageous, outspoken, straight-

<sup>1</sup> *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, by Mary Agnes Hamilton.

forward pacifism. As such, he was welcomed to their meetings ; as such, he was chosen as their leader and received their admiration, their regard, and their homage.

On the other hand, it was to the Liberals that he owed his seat in Parliament. No Labour man could have won Leicester at that time without the support of the Liberals. MacDonald's speeches and writing at the beginning of the War had their repercussions in his constituency. The Executive Committee of the Leicester Liberal Association passed a resolution expressing 'strong disapprobation' of MacDonald's attitude with regard to Sir Edward Grey. This warning note made him feel very uneasy. He felt that, if he was to retain their support when the next election came, he must be very careful and discreet. To play this double rôle between Liberal and Labour required the exercise always of a subtlety, a dexterity, a vigilance, and a patience which had strong psychological reactions on his character.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *THE WAR PERIOD*

So keenly did MacDonald feel the attacks made upon him in the Press and elsewhere that for a time he was completely unnerved. He lost heart and almost faded out of the Parliamentary picture. When he did speak in the House, he was carefully non-committal. He sought to be conciliatory and was evidently determined to live down the resentment which his writing in the first days of the War had stirred up.

Here is a typical example from a speech in the Commons delivered in 1916. He was taking no risks of misrepresentation. His theme was the safe one of Peace :

‘Merely talking patriotism, merely making perorations to speeches and so on, about the magnificence of our intentions—that is all right for recruiting purposes, but it is no good for the hard political duty imposed upon a body like this, whilst millions of our fellow-beings are laying down their lives on the battlefields of Europe. That is shirking our duty, and it is only in so far as the right hon. gentleman (the Foreign Secretary) keeps his diplomacy active, even when the noise of battle is most deafening, only in so far as he takes care that no single opportunities which the Armies give him, and no single opportunity which the men in the field give him to produce and widen out the basis of his coming peace—only in so far as he does his duty in that respect, and in so far as we do our duty by seeing that he does his, are we worthy to look in the eyes of those men and say that, though we stayed at home, we nevertheless did help them to do their work in the field.’

The leaders of the pacifist movement in the country were becoming more and more suspicious of MacDonald as the War continued. In this, as in other matters, they declared



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that they did not know where he stood. Relations between them became strained. He still retained his position on the Executive of the Labour Party, but even there he kept very much in the background.

As time went on and the War continued, he saw that, unless he took some steps to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the Party, his political career was ended. There was one way in which this could be done. He must address the Annual Conference of the Party ; his success at Conferences had always been extraordinary. He was confident that his persuasive eloquence would win round the delegates and so restore his prestige. On 16 January 1916 the fifteenth Annual Conference of the Labour Party was held at Bristol. This was his opportunity.

The first resolution was moved by Jim Sexton, now Sir James Sexton, of the Transport Workers' Union. It declared that the present action of the Government was fully justified in the present War, expressed its horror at the atrocities committed by Germany and her ally, and pledged the Conference to assist the Government as far as possible in the successful prosecution of the War. This resolution raised the clear issue for or against the War and the Government's conduct of it.

MacDonald seized the first chance of intervening. His speech had been so carefully prepared that it 'smelt of the lamp.' It was cleverly planned to obtain the maximum of agreement. It avoided points of difference and was conciliatory and persuasive. He had not risen for the purpose of raising any controversial question, he said, but he besought them to exercise that toleration which was their beneficent characteristic.

There was one accusation hurled against MacDonald during this War period which hurt him deeply. It was contained in the epithet 'pro-German.' The Independent Labour Party had been accused of being pro-German. He repudiated the suggestion ; they were not pro-German. Indeed, they were the most anti-German of any section of the nation. If he and his friends had gone astray, it was not because they wanted any mishap to befall our nation either as a political entity or as a spiritual expression of human needs and human endeavours. The difference between him and his friend Sexton was infinitesimal. He had one point of criticism. Referring to the

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vagueness and ambiguity in the resolution, he used a sentence which left the delegates absolutely bewildered. He said :

‘ If they were going to pass a resolution to go out to the whole world as a declaration of the Labour Party on the War, that resolution should not be drafted in such a way that at no particular point could they place their finger on precisely what it meant and what it tied them down to.’

The purpose of his peroration was very obvious. The honeyed word, the spice of flattery, the appeal to the memory and pride of achievement and his association with them in their former triumphs, were all stressed in the effort of persuasion. He hoped that they were going ‘ to face the future as men who had fought side by side in days gone by, men who had built up a Party so magnificent in its strength that it could produce a Conference like that one of the finest he had ever faced.’ Then came the peroration :

‘ Oh, how sad it was, how heart-breaking it was, that some of them had to stand up and face the Conference with pride in their hearts as to what it was and doubt in their hearts as to what it was to be. In the name of everything they held sacred, in the name of everything they believed in, in the name of everything they had hope for, let this be a purely passing affair, let this be one of those storms that disturb the most friendly of households and the most permanent of friendships. Let them go out from the Conference with teeth clenched and head down on their shoulders, determined to go through the dark days, but equally determined that, when they were over, back they would come to gather in the bonds of co-operation to fight the common enemy as enthusiastically and successfully as they had fought him before.’

In spite of this strong emotional appeal, the speech failed to impress the Conference, and MacDonald had to sit there in silence while speaker after speaker denounced his equivocation. ‘ Mr. MacDonald,’ said one, ‘ had the opportunity of his life to give a clear expression of his opinions and as to which side of the fence he was on, but he has not done so.’ This delegate protested against the ‘ clever points and finesse.’

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MacDonald's 'quibbling' word-spinning and 'ostrich-like attitude' was denounced by Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P., while Mr. Wardle, M.P., admitted that the speech was able and conciliatory, but he wanted to know where it would lead them. Mr. Alex. Wilkie, M.P., a Scots delegate, said that MacDonald's speech reminded him of a national dance they had in Scotland where they laid down two swords and danced all round them. MacDonald had done that to perfection; he had danced round the point without calling attention to a single word in the resolution. Where in all the world did MacDonald stand?

In the end, the motion commending the policy of the Government was carried by 1,502,000 to 602,000. This was another blow to MacDonald. He had hoped that his eloquent appeal would have stirred the Conference to a more favourable attitude. He had evidently miscalculated the mood and temper of the Labour Party. He had spoken too soon. This War period was a dark shadow on MacDonald's life. He suffered the most acute misery through it all and for four years afterwards. It had a permanent effect on his life and character. It is an interesting and illuminating fact that, although Keir Hardie, Snowden, Ponsonby, and others took a definite and outspoken attitude on the War, they were never subjected to the same violent personal attack that struck MacDonald. The reason is plain. These men were genuine and sincere in the profession of pacifism, and everyone recognized their straightforward, fearless honesty. MacDonald, on the other hand, after his initial blunder, sought to retrieve his position by evasion and equivocation. He was denounced, not for his principles, but for his opportunism. The Conservatives reprobated him as a 'timid trimmer' and the Liberal newspapers called him a 'humbug.'

## CHAPTER TEN

### *A GLASGOW SPEECH*

As Ramsay MacDonald's ability as a speaker was a potent factor in his success, it was an interesting experience to go to a meeting addressed by him, to stand behind the scenes, as it were, and watch the orator in action. There is a fascination in noting how a master of the speaker's craft awakens the emotions of a great audience, as a gifted musician would, and in observing, moreover, the reactions of the crowd under the spell of his eloquence.

MacDonald's fame as an orator was widespread. Much sought after, he readily accepted invitations to speak in all parts of the country. He certainly did not spare himself. He travelled thousands of miles to meetings and many a cold and weary night has he spent in the train between London and Scotland. He gave his services willingly and gratuitously. By this means, he made himself known to the rank and file of the Labour Movement up and down the country, and so established that reputation in Scotland which was so helpful to him, when, on his return to Parliament in 1922, he challenged Clynes for the leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party. It was the prestige he attained at these meetings for Socialist propaganda that largely determined how the Scots Members voted on that momentous occasion.

On Sunday, 8 October 1916, a great political meeting was held in Glasgow. It met under the auspices of the Independent Labour Party, and was a memorial gathering in honour of one who was a pioneer of British Socialism, James Keir Hardie. The place was well chosen. Glasgow is the most politically conscious city in Great Britain. Two Prime Ministers claim Glasgow as their own, and many notable statesmen have been amongst its citizens.

The late Lord Oxford has borne testimony to the high level of political intelligence of its people, and declared that, keen

**MANAGER:** "BATTLING RAMSAY, THE ALMOST-CHAMPION OF THE WORLD, WILL NOW ISSUE HIS NIGHTLY CHALLENGE TO TAKE ON ANY LADY OR GENT IN THE AUDIENCE."

(Several brutal-looking gents mount the steps to the stage.)

**BATTLING RAMSAY (anxiously):** "ANY LADY? ANY LADY?"

(With acknowledgments to the late Henry Williams famous vaudeville act.)



**THE BIG FIGHT.**

**LOW**

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dialectician though he was, he never faced the 'heckling' of a Scots political meeting without profound misgiving. It was in Glasgow that Keir Hardie spent most of his public life, and this great city is intimately associated with the birth and growth of Scottish Socialism. It was a Glasgow audience that Gladstone swept to a wild frenzy of enthusiasm by one of the most magnificent perorations ever spoken. In the City Hall, Glasgow, the sensational meeting was held during the Boer War when Keir Hardie and Lloyd George appeared on the same platform, associated in a denunciation of British Imperialism. The tact and strategy of Lloyd George prevented that meeting from developing out of uproar into riot. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain paid a tribute to Glasgow by choosing it as the platform to launch the great Tariff Campaign which became such a landmark in British politics. The leaders of all political parties have declaimed from its platforms, and many political manoeuvres have been planned in its precincts. Like most industrial cities, Glasgow had once a reputation for Liberalism deepening into Radicalism. Now, Socialist red is the prevailing hue, with here and there a streak of incarnadine Communism.

The audience that gathered on that Sunday evening in 1916 was notable, both for its size and for its character. Every seat could have been filled twice over, and crowds stood massed around the doors at the back of the Hall. From the platform, the closely packed audience looked like a sea. Under the cold glare of the electric light the faces were pale beneath the brown cloth caps. Those caps were not of the deer-stalker type that Hardie wore on a historic occasion. Not more than half the men in the Hall wore collars. It was a working-class audience. Many women were there, as keen and enthusiastic as the men. Two terrible years of the Great War had passed, and the end seemed as far off as ever. It formed the background of every mind in the meeting. To many in that audience the tragedy was brought home, as, day by day, they learned of husband, son or brother sacrificed in the terrible combat then being waged on the Western Front. It was a quiet crowd that sat there waiting. There was a noticeable absence of the chattering levity characteristic of audiences farther south. Those people were restrained, and serious—dour, maybe—and sat with folded arms, silent, looking grimly in front of them.

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Suddenly there is a stir. The platform party are entering. The audience fling aside their reserve, as it were a garment, and, upstanding, cheer and cheer again as Ramsay MacDonald appears and walks briskly to his seat. P. J. Dollan, a Socialist of national reputation, in in the chair. He is one of the most effective propagandists in Scotland and can lighten solid argument with now and then a scintillating gleam of Irish wit. The cheer that greets his uprising proclaims his popularity, and his clever speech is a bright introduction. The next speaker is also obviously a favourite. It is William Stewart, a revered pioneer of Socialism in Scotland. As the name is called, a quiet, little, hunched, bearded man slides softly to the front of the platform and is heartily cheered. Nothing particular to look at, say you, perhaps. But—stay—listen. He begins to speak. His voice is strangely deep, and he speaks with the most perfect diction, the most ample vocabulary and with that nicety of classical allusion which is a delight to hear. The straightforward logic of his argument, the pithy anecdote, the witty hit—all combine to make up a perfect speech. It is a speech that thrills the hearts of all who hear it.

The preliminary speeches are tactfully designed to provide just the proper atmosphere for the event of the evening and rouse the crowd into a mood of expectancy. Now comes the time for which that vast concourse has waited so long and so patiently. The Chairman calls upon James Ramsay MacDonald. As he rises quietly, the enthusiasm of the audience overflows. Springing to their feet, they raise their arms and shout. Hands, handkerchiefs, hats, and caps are waved frantically. The din is deafening and continuous. Suddenly the organist, appreciating the mood of the audience, strikes up "For he's a jolly good fellow," and all join lustily in the singing. As MacDonald stands there motionless, save for a slight nervous twitching of the hands, and looks over the cheering crowd, he must have reviewed his difficult task with some misgiving.

The object of the meeting, the time, the place, the people, and the circumstances all combine to make his undertaking formidable. The object of this great assembly is to pay a tribute to Keir Hardie. These people reverence the name of Hardie and expect MacDonald to sing a pæan of praise to his memory. He is compelled to deliver a panegyric on one to

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whom, for several years, he has been not only unfriendly, but hostile. Few, indeed, in this Hall are aware of this awkward relationship.

MacDonald is familiar with Glasgow, the hot-bed of revolt, the centre of the Red Clyde. He appreciates exactly the kind of stimulating address that would please his audience. He knows the speech that is expected. They want a speech that will not only defy the obnoxious Defence of the Realm Act, but will challenge the law of sedition. In a speech in war-time he cannot avoid making some reference to the War. His audience is overwhelmingly pacifist. He knows their opinions on the War and he knows, too, what position they think he occupies. There was never any doubt as to where Keir Hardie stood on the War, nor, for that matter, was there any doubt as to where Philip Snowden and other leaders of the Independent Labour Party stood. These men might be condemned for their unpopular opinions, but there was much admiration for their sincerity, their courage, and their candour.

MacDonald had never shared the I.L.P. position on the War. While it demanded the stopping of the War by negotiated peace, he had declared that, now that we were in the War, we must see it through. Hardie had complained that he never knew exactly where MacDonald stood on this great question. Evidence there was in plenty of his hesitancy, his vacillation. Speeches of MacDonald could be quoted that showed him with his foot in both camps, pacifist and militarist--speeches that were as opportunist as the Vicar of Bray, as ambiguous as the Oracle of Delphi. Of this, the cheering crowd that faces him this night knows nothing. These men of the Rebel City are cheering the man whom the Press calls a traitor--cheering him, indeed, because he is called a traitor.

More cheers ; the hero of the hour gives a deprecatory wave of the hand, and they at last consent to be silent. As he stands there alone amidst thousands, one sees that the gods have been lavish in their gifts. His handsome appearance, his impressive manner, his forceful personality combined with the alluring resonance of a golden voice, move the audience to unquestioning, uncritical approval. Not without reason did the Greeks call oratory the greatest of the Arts. MacDonald knew the rules ; he had studied them diligently. How shall he begin ?



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He knows the importance of the 'Exordium.' How did all the classic orators begin—Demosthenes and Paul at Athens ; Mark Antony and Cicero at Rome ; Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg ? He starts with a local, personal allusion—something that will associate him with his audience, and link both with Keir Hardie.

He reminds them that, since they met in that hall twelve months ago, the shadowy figure of death had been present in many households.

'We met then,' he goes on, 'to bury Keir Hardie. We meet now to assure ourselves that he has risen. Last year there was many a happy woman who is now a widow. There was many a happy child who is now an orphan. This is a sort of sacramental service held in gratitude for the men and women who have died in order that we might live more fully and more amply than we did before. A year ago, we had gone for twelve months downwards upon a road that led us away back to thoughts and passions that existed before civilization came. During the last twelve months, we have gone on farther upon that road. We have not come to the end of it yet. But, meeting here with the memory of Keir Hardie in our minds, how justified we are in paying our tribute to his memory in the shape of a claim that his practical wisdom was sound when he told us what lay at the end of this road. When the bugles blew two years ago, telling Europe to descend into the furnace through fire and smoke and destruction and slaughter, what did Hardie and his friends do ? When a shipwreck takes place every man does not fly up to the Captain's deck or go to the boats ; every man has his own work to do, different from other men's work, and the safety and security of all depends, not upon every man doing the same work as his neighbour, but on a sub-division of labour, so that individual services are co-ordinated to give the maximum security and the maximum amount of safety. *When the bugles of war broke out, we went to our appointed places.*'

The realism of the picture grips the imagination of the audience and they break in to applaud. He continues :

'What was the appointed place of International Socialism ?

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We knew perfectly well. We had read our histories. We knew that a perfect typhoon would rage round all our liberties, uprooting them, breaking, crushing and scattering them - north, south, east, and west. Our appointed place was to stand by those liberties and defend them. Hardie knew that, if we lost our democratic sense, if we could put on one side our democratic political instincts, militarism would come across the seas; militarism would come to our own land; militarism would sit on our own thresholds; and, whilst our soldiers were fighting it on the Continent, our military authorities would give it hospitality, harbourage, and welcome.'

This rather vague and metaphorical succession of subordinative clauses was taken by the audience as a courageous reference to the hated Defence of the Realm Act, and they applauded so suddenly and so tumultuously that MacDonald did not get a chance to add another metaphor.

'Our biologists tell us of life breeding true. They mean by that, that the offspring of parents inherit from those parents certain essential characteristics. Hardie told us, the I.L.P. told the country, that war breeds true. And the offspring never has been, never will be, and never can be peace and national security. The offspring of war is war. The offspring of war is hate. The offspring of war is national insecurity. The nation will never find peace by the sword.'

The sequence of sentences all beginning with the same subject and running as it were on parallel lines is a well-known device for obtaining emphasis. It is a dialectic device that MacDonald constantly employed.

'This War has destroyed this nation as an island. We are no longer isolated. The Navy is an obsolete weapon. We can no longer stand apart unless we change completely our policy. Conscription is not for this war, but for the next war.' (Loud applause.)

There spoke the demagogue. It must be carefully remembered that this speech was delivered in 1916 during a crisis in the War. It was never reported in the Press and therefore

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MacDonald could play down to his audience with impunity. He was saying what he knew they would cheer. Conscription would be an irksome and perhaps intolerable interference with personal liberty, but the whole question was whether the national emergency demanded and justified it. But MacDonald, more behind the scenes than most Members of Parliament, knew well the crisis that had arisen on the Western Front. He knew that conscription was to meet the actual definite need of the moment. It was an expedient for the immediate present—not a policy for the uncertain future. MacDonald was aware of this.

He continued :

‘ Militarism has increased its power in the nation—not because it has succeeded, but because it has failed. It is just like the gambler gambling upon a system. He sees certain things are necessary in order that he may break the bank and secure gains upon the table. He works out his method ; lays his small stake to begin with ; loses it. He tables a higher stake ; he wins. He goes on and on piling up higher and higher stakes ; undertaking more and more risks, being more and more complete in the jeopardy that he runs, till at last absolute ruin stares him in the face. And that is the fate of Europe, if we are going to trust to militarism after this War has come to an end.’

The short, staccato sentences come rapidly, as the picture is built up. The simile is as vivid as its relevance is vague.

‘ Assume that Hardie and his friends and the Party to which he belonged, the Party he founded ; assume that they honestly held the opinions they enunciated. I ask : “ What was *our* duty ? Our duty was to tell the country not to trust to militarism in order to save itself, but to see to it that this War, created by an old order of diplomacy, was inevitable, not because the Devil was about in some nation more than in another, but because the whole fabric was rotten at the core, and was bound to fall.’

It is obvious, of course, that, in a gathering of zealous Socialists, that conclusion would be received with loud acclama-

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tion. The next sentence, however, was very puzzling as it seemed to approve defensive warfare.

‘That does not mean that you are not to defend, that does not mean that you are simply to sit at home with your hands in your pockets. Some of the attacks made upon Keir Hardie are very curious, coming from quarters from which they came. We are supposed not to have cared about Belgium. Why, whilst those who are unjustly throwing that charge at us were suppressing nationalities as near home as Ireland; whilst they had no echo in their hearts to the national aspirations of Scotland, Hardie was vindicating the nationalist cause and sacrificing political prospects and understandings with his friends in order to secure that nationality and the principle of nationality should settle how Ireland was going to be governed in future.’

There follows what was, indeed, a most amazing analogy.

‘Before a single woman in the invaded territories was outraged by a foreign soldier, Hardie pleaded, with a fulness of heart that was overwhelming, the cause of your own outraged sisters in your own streets of Glasgow. Before war came, we had dramatic cruelties and slaughter of innocent children. We were appealing to you to prevent the slaughter of children by Capitalism in your own country.’ (Loud applause.)

In view of MacDonald’s future conduct in suppressing free speech and freedom of the Press *in peace time*, it is interesting to note his word on this subject in the exceptional circumstances of a great war.

‘Before Prussianism unveiled itself to Europe, Hardie, in days of peace, tried to drag the veil from the unlovely creature, so that you might cease to trust it for your national defence. And now when it is made welcome in your own land; when we have got the Defence of the Realm Act, which is quite good Prussianism, even up to date—(laughter)—we stand again—we have never moved—and say that liberty of opinion, provided that it is honest, is as essential to the successful prosecution of the War by this country as armaments, guns, rifles, ships, and so on.’

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In view of MacDonald's actions and attitude, it is interesting to hear him acknowledging the high moral purpose of the War :

‘What are we fighting for? Not for a patch of country painted red upon the map of the world, not for a mere geographical expression. You are fighting for the soul of a people. You are fighting for liberty. What miserable cowards you would be if you allowed militarism to blow out those sacred lamps burning brightly upon your altars, whilst pretending to relight them on foreign altars. Everything that Hardie foretold—all his general attitude—has been proved to be sound during the last twelve months, since he went to his grave. Those of us who have friends who have left us, friends whose hands were full of active life—how often, when the blinds are drawn and the world is shut out, do we wonder at our fireside whether they know what is going on. We wonder and we wonder, and we go almost and knock at the gates that separate life from death, and, in the pain of our souls and in the yearnings of our hearts, we would plead for some assurance.’

This is a touching picture, and, although the relevance is not apparent, the effect was a swift emotional reaction of the audience.

‘There is one cause to which he pinned his faith. One of the last times I saw him, when the freezing finger of Death was quietly touching him, we talked of the International.’

One of the most cherished ideals of the Socialist is the brotherhood of man. When MacDonald refers to the International, his hearers catch up the allusion and cheer rapturously. He pauses, another burst of applause sweeps through the hall ; and then, in a quiet voice of deep emotion, he deftly pictures woman of hostile nations meeting in mutual sorrow.

‘The passions of the moment will pass, and the time will come when particularly our women-folk, the women whose hearts are most sadly wounded, will perhaps visit that terrible graveyard which stretches for a hundred miles east and west. Perhaps one day there will be a pilgrimage of German women

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to their graves, and a pilgrimage of British women to their graves. And they will discover each other weeping over those who have been lost to them, and those tears will wash away all the sins, all the evil, all the wickedness and the cruelty, and this horrible chapter of tragedy through which we are going will be closed, closed for ever, and a new one of sympathy, of affection, of love and co-operation will be opened. And then the democracies of Europe will hang up their swords, because they will be no longer required, and their guns and their bugles will rust and rot in the museums.' (Prolonged applause.)

There was, even in the audience, a sprinkling of people who were aware of the attacks on MacDonald, which had been bitter and constant, and began many years before the War. To them MacDonald's Socialist faith was suspect. On the other hand, all who were there idolized Keir Hardie. The strategy of MacDonald's speech on this occasion, therefore, was constantly to associate himself with Hardie. The beliefs which he claims for Hardie were no exclusive creed of his, but merely the commonplaces of Socialist thought and not worth emphasizing, except to bring in the name of Hardie. That was instantaneously the cue for applause ; it never failed.

'Those are the things that crowd upon us, but, when looking a little more widely, what is it that strikes us most about him? This—and it sounds as a commonplace to say it—Hardie believed in the people. (Hear, hear.) Whilst some people say that they believe in the people, they always create machinery that is so complicated that the people are kept far away. How much did you know about this War before you were asked to join the colours? Some of you say that Labour is more powerful and more consulted than ever before. (Laughter.) I dare say they talk more to you. They pat you on the back. They are more wise than you are in that respect. You might as well say to a man you condemn to death, and who quarrels with you for being condemned to death: "I don't want to leave you out in the cold altogether. Let me talk matters over. Would you like to be hanged by silk or a hemp rope?" And the man goes away

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and sings your praises for having consulted him, and taken him into your confidence.'

MacDonald, when delivering an important speech such as this one was, always saw himself as one of the great orators of history. In his speech, he patterned himself on Mark Antony, and, just as the Roman orator delivered his memorable oration on the death of Cæsar, so MacDonald would deliver a notable speech on the death of Hardie. The great scene in the Forum as described by Shakespeare is present in MacDonald's mind, and now and again the phrases themselves are on his tongue. 'It is not meet,' says Antony, 'that you know how Cæsar loved you.'

'Hardie believed in the people. He stretched wings over them and shielded them. It was always a sore point with him when anybody criticized you. He never failed to criticize you himself, but it was always the criticism by a mother of her children by her own fireside when the neighbours are not listening. He had such an affection for you : he never could see you or think of you doing wrong without trying to set you right. But when anybody, not entitled either by their own lives or conduct, did criticize you, then all the leonine fury of the man got up, and you never in all your history had a more undaunted and unbendable champion than that man.'

Some time before this speech was delivered, there had been sensational scenes in Glasgow during a visit from Mr. Lloyd George. The daily Press were closely censored in their news of the meeting of the munition workers which was held in the City Hall, Glasgow, at which Mr. Lloyd George had received a very hostile reception. The Scottish Socialist weekly *Forward* published a verbatim report of the meeting, and Lloyd George in swift retaliation suppressed the paper. As *Forward* is a very popular paper in Scotland, MacDonald knew he had the whole meeting with him in his denunciation of the action of Mr. Lloyd George. This line was greeted with enthusiasm, and so MacDonald pursued it further.

'It is about time that we had a new set of people taking an interest in the settlement of wars. I want this to be the

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last war. Must I take Mr. Lloyd George's opinion as to how that is going to be done? Have I no right in using my own judgment? Have you no right in using yours to think the matter out, and as free citizens—for we can still claim to be that, in name at any rate—to express our opinions just in the same way as Lloyd George expresses his? Mr. Lloyd George has had many opinions. He has believed in them all quite honestly. He *may* be perfectly right at last. I am not saying. It is a mysterious problem, but this I do say, that whether right or wrong he has no business to suppress papers that express opinions with which he himself does not happen for the moment to agree.' (Prolonged applause and cries of '*Forward.*')

Nothing appeals sooner or stronger to a Scot-Socialist, Internationalist though he be—than Scotland itself. All Scotsmen are at heart keen nationalists. MacDonald knew that when he touched that chord, the response would be instantaneous and overwhelming.

'I want to honour and to preserve my country. I want no ill to befall her. I want the feet of no enemy to be placed upon her soil. Every churchyard that holds in sacred keeping those whose names have made it a pride to us to belong to a nation; every page of our history that tells of the success of a war for liberty and a struggle for right—what Scotsman on the face of the earth will ever cease to hold the land to which these things belong except as a dear treasure of his spirit and his soul?'

By this time MacDonald's hearers had been thoroughly worked up. A nervous restlessness pervades them, and they lean forward excitedly to listen. Again and again as the orator makes a topical retort, he has to pause as gusts of applause sweep the building.

'With these feelings in my mind, am I going to obey somebody clad in khaki—not that that is objectionable—but because he happens to be clad in khaki—somebody who probably has none of these sentiments at all; who, if he owned these churchyards, would sell them to the highest bidder if he happened to come over from America for curiosity; somebody who belongs to the families who have



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cleared our straths of the men so much required now ; who, because they have been so successful in their clearances, now demand the Conscription of men of forty-five ? With these feelings of national honour in my mind, why am I going to be compelled to say only what these gentlemen approve of, and publish nothing unless what receives their sanction ? ’

There is always a ready response to any reference to Highland clearances, and especially so in Glasgow, where a very large proportion of the audience is made up of men and women to whom the sad story of Highland depopulation is real and personal.

‘ What right have they to refuse men with opinions as good as theirs ; men who have served the public when they were serving their pockets (loud and prolonged cheering)—men who have thought these things out in the quiet of their own fireside with as much political training, to put it very mildly, as they themselves ever had ? What right have they ? Upon what principle of law ; upon what principle of common sense ; upon what principle of national service have they the right to say that only opinions which they think fit and proper are going to be the truth in this country ? I deny that right. The I.L.P. denies that right. We shall never submit so long as we have breath in our bodies and ability to speak and stir up the people.’

As the craftsman-orator approached the climax of his speech, he drew a vignette of Hardie which has that sentimental, emotional appeal characteristic of the oratory of MacDonald.

‘ Keir Hardie : there was your old-fashioned man. Every lane, every step, every item of his home, his own characteristic. There was your man of individuality. You saw him down the Strand in London, crowded with thousands upon thousands of feet ; this great river of ordinary commonplace humanity, where even strong individuality is apt to be lost. But there he was like a great boulder of whinstone, telling of the freshness of the hills. There he was, this strong individuality, amidst men, and yet above men : human and yet separate. You sing in Scotland “ I to the hills will lift

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mine eyes." There are some men who are like the hills ; when you look at them you feel that strength, that power of eternity, that solidness which does not pass with a generation, but which stands the storms and the climates, which gladdens your eyes and which your children to generations will see after you have gone and slept and been forgotten. There are some men whose personalities give you that impression of eternity and unshakeable foundation and everlastingness. Hardie was one of those men. Such a man of rugged being and massive soul, of imperturbable courage and of mystic insight was the man who founded the I.L.P.' (Loud applause.)

The peroration was a cleverly and carefully devised linking up of Socialism, Brotherhood, and Keir Hardie.

'The moment the peoples of Europe question things--the moment they ask why, how and wherefore--that moment the magic spell of war will be broken. They will come together in their sorrow and demand peace and lay the foundations of peace. Blood has baptized you into a fellowship and communion sacred and eternal, if you are wise in your time to follow the lead of men like Keir Hardie. It is the old order that is crumbling and breaking to fragments, filling the air with its dust and with the noise and confusion of its downfall. Nothing else than that. The old order passes away, and you and I, standing once more at Hardie's tomb, having lingered the past hour with his memory and thoughts of him in our minds, we go back into the world to do our duty, to reconstruct society, to rebuild the fabric that has fallen, to make good the walls that have been crushed ; to put a new idea, a new beauty, a new holiness into the lives of the peoples of Europe.'

This speech was one of the most notable that MacDonald ever delivered. It was talked about in Glasgow for years afterwards. It put MacDonald at once at the head of Socialist speakers. Before this, he had been respected, admired ; now he was idolized and worshipped. The extraordinary success of this speech had a far-reaching effect on MacDonald's after-career. The technique of it was excellent. The acoustic

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properties of the great hall were perfect, and the rich resonant tones of the orator easily carried to the remotest listener. It has been said that the success of a speech depends as much on the receptivity of the audience as upon the inspiration of the orator. Some cynic has said that the manner is as important as the matter in making a speech. At any rate, there were many things in the speech, the significance of which was not understood at the time under the influence of the occasion, but which were appreciated afterwards. It should have been noted that MacDonald was eloquent in his condemnation of the diplomacy of the past, grave and serious in his warnings for the future, but made no vital comment on what was of supreme importance, his attitude to the day-to-day prosecution of the War! To the question, what should be done now, he had, at that meeting, no answer to give. We, who were his applauding hearers, should have noticed this omission at the time, but the spell of the orator's personality, the hypnosis of mass suggestion, added to our ignorance *then* of the essential facts, deadened our critical faculties.

As a specimen of oratory, the speech had many defects. It was, perhaps, too emotional, was strongly tainted with demagogism ; it had long, sprawling, bombastic passages ; it was overloaded with metaphor, which robbed it, not of clarity only, but of coherence. Yet, in spite of all this and more, and, when the speaker at last made an end of speaking, and ' the voice of the charmer ' ceased, the listener seemed to awake as from an enchantment, and to be sorry that the trance was over, as who should say : ' If it be so to dream, let me sleep on.'

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *LEICESTER, WOOLWICH, AND ABERAVON ELECTIONS*

**M**acDonald was overwhelmed by his defeat at Leicester in the General Election of 1918. Although he expected that the attack made upon him in the Press was bound to endanger his chance of re-election, the result was unexpected. Leicester was a two-Member constituency, each elector having two votes. As MacDonald had been fortunate enough to have the general support of the Liberal organization in the constituency, he had invariably obtained the Liberal's second preference on the ballot paper. This unwritten agreement between MacDonald and the Liberals had had its effect on his policy. He had to have regard to it in his actions in the House of Commons, and it tempered his Socialism down to an opportunist Liberalism. It was a hostage for his good behaviour in Parliament to the Liberals who helped to put him there.

It is interesting to note, in view of after events, that, when the Right Hon. J. H. Thomas, the railway Trade Union Leader, entered Parliament for the first time in 1910, a similar arrangement held between that Labour Leader and the Liberals at Derby. Sir Thomas Roe was the Liberal candidate there, and he regarded Mr. Thomas not as a political opponent, but as a friendly ally in the contest against the Conservative Party.

At Leicester, in 1918, not only had the Liberals deserted MacDonald because of his war-time unpopularity, but the Asquithian Liberal Party itself had also such unpopularity that its candidates were all but annihilated in the electoral landslide. Deprived of this Liberal support, MacDonald's defeat was inevitable. Failure is always bitter, and to MacDonald it was particularly so. To be rejected by a constituency that he had done so much to win, in a constituency that he had served so faithfully for twelve eventful years, and in a constituency

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that he believed to be 'safe' was a cruel blow. It seemed to break his spirit and blot out all hope for the future. He looked a broken man at that time, for his sensitive nature suffered so keenly that he was quite unable to hide his distress. Fortunately, he was now able to indulge his love for foreign travel and so for a time to get away from the scene of his political downfall. Europe at that time presented an interesting study to a politician. It was possible for him to proceed through the stricken countries of the Continent and learn at first hand the shattering effects of the War.

When he returned, he once again took up his work as a Socialist propagandist, and the Independent Labour Party welcomed him to its platform. His oratorical appeal was as strong as ever, and he spoke in many towns in England, Scotland, and Wales. All this time, he was eager to re-enter Parliament. His first chance came in 1921, when he was adopted as Labour candidate for the industrial constituency of Woolwich. A by-election had been caused by the retirement of Will Crooks, a very popular Labour Member. The contest that followed was, by general admission, perhaps one of the dirtiest elections on record. Liberals, Tories, Labour Coalitionists and Communists combined to oppose him. All the envenomed hostility of the War period was united against him. Still he entered the fight with great courage and enthusiasm. By-election fights are a class by themselves, but this was unique even in that class.

'I don't hope for what you may call a pleasant fight,' he said at the time. 'I don't hope for a gentlemanly fight. I don't hope for a clean fight, because I know it is not to be one. I know this, that so far as I am concerned, and so far as my friends are concerned, we are going to fight a clean fight. We are going to examine political principles and not going to insult you by pulling down the flag of Labour, dragging it in the dirt; we shall lift it up, in order that the breeze may dry it and clean it from some of the dirt that it may have got. The day has come when working men and women, having the vote, have to exercise their intelligence in the exercise of the vote. Appeal to emotion, appeal to passions, appeal to prejudices, appeal to ignorance—let the Coalition do that. Labour will not do it, because Labour ought not to do it.'

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This by-election was also noteworthy because of the amusing antics of what came to be known as 'Bottomley's Circus,' a hooligan group that went around the constituency, haranguing at the street corners, denouncing MacDonald as a traitor, and breaking up Labour meetings. The opposing candidate had been carefully chosen to appeal to the mood of the moment. He was Captain Gee, V.C., and the hoardings screamed forth the jingle : VOTE FOR GEE, V.C., AND MAKE G. V.C. M.P. A feature of the Election was the doorstep canvassing by Society ladies. No slander was mean enough for them. All sorts of shameful innuendoes and cruel insinuations were made against the personal character of the Labour candidate.

Beginning with a great handicap against him, MacDonald gained daily. Up to the last moment, the issue was in doubt, and in the end he was only beaten by 683 votes. When one considers how near this election was to the War period, how personal prejudice could be stirred up against him on account of his attitude at that time, and how much political opposition could be combined against him, the result is surprising. That he came so near to victory was undoubtedly due to his forceful personality, his wonderful industry and his compelling oratory. Although he was unsuccessful at that time in his attempt to re-enter Parliament, his sensational electioneering augmented his reputation in the country and consolidated his prestige in the Labour Party. It was felt that, given a more favourable opportunity, success was assured.

It was to Wales that he afterwards turned. The Welsh, like the Scots, take their politics almost as seriously as they do their religion! Keir Hardie laid the solid foundation of the political Labour Movement in South Wales, and to-day, twenty years after his death, his name is spoken there with an almost religious reverence. His speeches, delivered in a broad Scots accent, not unlike the Welsh, appealed to the Celtic emotion of the Welsh and stirred their soul for the cause he so eloquently preached. It was the miners of Merthyr who first welcomed Keir Hardie, and, in 1900, after a campaign of only eleven hours, the shortest political contest on record, gave him a sensational victory.

To Wales, then, MacDonald turned in his next attempt to enter Parliament, and there is no doubt that he profited by

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the work of his pioneering compatriot. He was selected as Labour candidate for the mining constituency of Aberavon, in South Wales, under the auspices of the Independent Labour Party. At the little town of Port Talbot, he delivered a speech that showed that he had overcome the reactions of disappointment and defeat. He had brought back from the desolation of stricken Europe a message of hope, and he sounded a call of confidence in a world of disorder and despair.

MacDonald seldom quotes poetry in his perorations, but, on this occasion, he had hit upon a thought that was appropriate to his message. 'I often think of the verse,' he said :

“ *Oh, sometimes glimpses on my sight,  
Through present wrong, the eternal right ;  
And step by step, since Time began,  
I see the steady gain of man.*”

When I can say that from my heart, I think of the Labour Movement and of the Independent Labour Party, and those glorious past years of fight—past years when, although beaten down on our hands and knees and almost broken, we were never defeated, past years which bore to us the trophies of victory as well as the wounds of battle. Standing to-day in the midst of this Europe and with the consciousness of its tragedy in my heart, I still repeat that verse and believe it, because there are men and women like yourselves, thinking, working, and organizing, believing fine things and dreaming noble dreams, and determined that, in so far as you can, you are going to embody them in the practical government of this country.' This was a fitting introduction to a new campaign, and his audiences were stirred.

For two years MacDonald nursed the constituency of Aberavon. It was two years of increasing political enthusiasm in South Wales. The meetings were always crowded, and there was an atmosphere as of a religious revival when MacDonald made a tour of the district. The General Election of 1922, important for the country, was a landmark in the life of MacDonald. The by-election at Woolwich had taught him much ; it had been really a moral victory. If the campaign had been waged free from the flamboyant patriotism of the post-war years, the seat could have been won. It would, how-

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ever, like all London seats, have been a most precarious and exacting seat to hold. Aberavon, on the other hand, among many points in its favour, had one that weighed a great deal with MacDonald. He was assured that there would be a complete absence of that personal attack and violent abuse which had been so conspicuous a feature of the Woolwich fight. The Welsh miners were at least friendly, and the contest promised not only to be successful, but to be easy and interesting.

As it happened, the campaign in the mining valleys of South Wales was a triumphant progress. Indeed, it made so deep an impression on MacDonald, that he wrote a descriptive account of the election, which he afterwards incorporated in his book *Wanderings and Excursions*.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *THE DEATH WATCH BEETLE IN THE RAFTERS*

**T**he first Coalition Government of Lloyd George was formed to win the War, the second Coalition was expected to make the peace. It had been thought that the experiences of the War and the exigencies of the aftermath demanded the wiping out of the old parties and the emergence of something new and different. Alkali Tory and acid Liberal would chemically unite and produce a neutral salt, a new Centre Party, a *tertium quid* possessing the best qualities of the originals. Hybrids are proverbially unproductive, 'without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity.' Not so the second Lloyd George Coalition. It had a numerous and mixed, some would have said a mongrel, progeny, the individual members of which were looked at askance by one parent or the other. Lloyd George had a policy of post-war reconstruction, had planned a great programme of social legislation. He himself declared that it was the greatest Socialist programme ever proposed in this country. It is a singular compliment to his power and authority, or it may have been to his optimism, that he believed he had actually got the approval of the majority of his Coalition Cabinet to his great scheme of national reconstruction. There is no doubt that the people were with him, only the politicians opposed. It cannot be denied that he intended to carry out the pledge, often quoted against him, of making Britain 'a land fit for heroes to live in.' Where he made the mistake was in thinking that he could carry over into the Peace, the idealism, the spirit of self-sacrifice which the War called forth. War, like misery, acquaints a man with strange bedfellows and it is natural that the Tories in the aftermath, with the element of danger removed, should find themselves uneasy partners with Liberals. Besides, Coalitions are always unpopular. They embody the principle of compromise. Agreement among differentiated elements can only be got by toning down and

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sacrificing something in the interests of unity and co-operation. Many Conservatives were finding their allegiance irksome and were anxious to get back to the status and authority of an independent party. It was natural that the old dyed-in-the-wool Tory politician who had denounced the Lloyd George of the Land-Tax-Budget, Linchouse days, should resent association with this rascal Radical. Not all the glory of the War days, not all the service he had rendered to his country in the hour of her dire peril could save him. It might be that as the Athenians voted for the banishment of Aristides because they were annoyed to hear him everywhere called 'The Just,' so the Conservatives voted for the deposition of Lloyd George because they were tired of hearing him constantly acclaimed as 'the Man that won the War.'

Violently opposed to him too, were what were called the 'Hard Faces,' those Members of Parliament who had made money out of the War. They had been denounced in dramatic invective by Bonar Law in the House of Commons. These war profiteers saw their ill-gotten gains in danger. They were the real Conservatives, out to conserve the spoils of war.

The emergence of a leader in any political party is a matter of historical importance. It has been said that the quickest way to fame for the ambitious is to attack a leader - the higher up the better. This will bring the spot-light immediately upon the humblest back-bencher.

Baldwin realized that to bring down the Coalition he must attack Lloyd George. But he made his assault in his own characteristic way. There is no doubt that he owed a great deal to Lloyd George. Every step in his advancement, from an unknown Member from the back benches, to the Treasury Bench, the Presidency of the Board of Trade, and finally into the Cabinet itself, had been at the hands of Lloyd George. Now he was organizing the Tory malcontents. Yet it was Baldwin who, some time before in the House of Commons, had felt called upon to address the following homily to his friends behind him :

<sup>1</sup> There are a large number of Tories here to-day who would never have been here if they had not had the Lloyd George token in 1918. It sits badly on these men to indulge in captious criticism of the Prime Minister.'

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This fatherly reproof must be taken in the Pickwickian sense, for if his reprimand was justified in March 1922 it was doubly justified seven months later. What had happened in the interval was that the opposition to the Coalition had been increased and strengthened. Baldwin rebuked the rebels until he saw the rebels winning.

If the Tory revolt against the Coalition were successful an interesting situation as to the Premiership would arise. If Austen Chamberlain had been less honourable, if he had been willing to stoop to intrigue, he might have been Prime Minister. As it was his loyalty to Lloyd George would definitely exclude him from the leadership of the Party and therefore from the Premiership. In the absence of Bonar Law through illness, the most likely choice for Prime Minister was the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon. Baldwin, who had been recommended for office to Bonar Law, as one who was 'discreet enough to be safe and stupid enough not to intrigue,' set out to belie that appreciation. He moved actively behind the scenes. He realized the possibilities of the situation and proceeded to hitch his modest little scooter to Curzon's lordly chariot. Suddenly Lord Curzon, to his amazement, received overtures from three junior colleagues of the Cabinet, who were anxious to co-operate with him in overthrowing Lloyd George and setting up an independent Conservative Administration. The dauntless three were led by one who had been declared 'too stupid for intrigue.' Baldwin and two other members of Lloyd George's Cabinet

'approached Lord Curzon with the request that they should meet at his house to discuss their action as occasion might require and they gave him definite assurances that, from this time onward they were prepared to associate themselves with him and to join him in resigning if the necessity arose.'<sup>1</sup>

So did Baldwin, Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, and Lord Peel visit the Foreign Secretary at his mansion in Carlton House Terrace. That he fully realized the significance of the Baldwin overtures is seen by Curzon's shrewd comment :

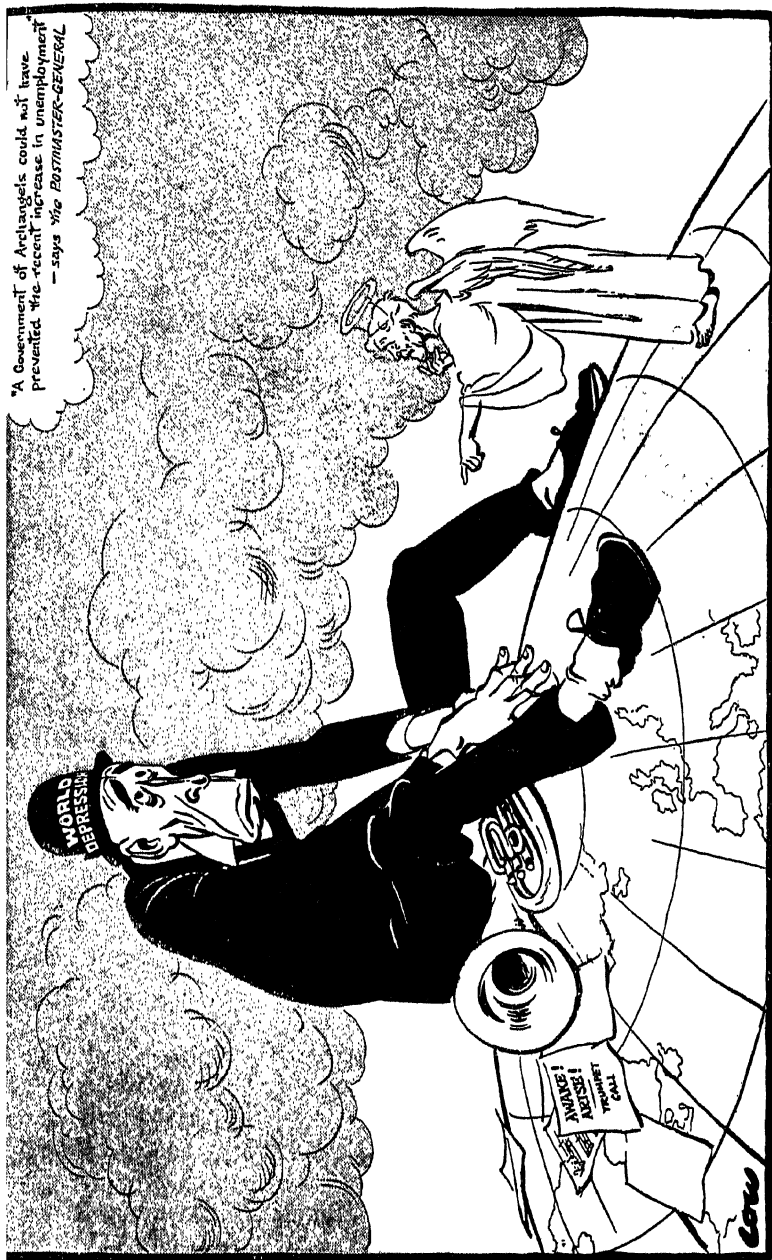
'When a group of Cabinet Ministers begin to meet separ-

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Lord Curzon*, by Lord Ronaldshay, Vol. III, p. 309.

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ately and to discuss independent action, the death tick is audible in the rafters.'

What changed the growing disaffection from a secret intrigue against Lloyd George to an open attack on the Coalition Government was the action of Lord Beaverbrook. He is a vivid, volatile, outspoken personality with the faith, the courage, and enthusiasm of an evangelist. At a time when so few politicians believe in anything, it is amazing that this man has not long ago been disillusioned. In spite of set-backs, of discouragements, desertions, and betrayals by his allies from time to time, he still remains neither embittered nor dismayed, but confident in the ultimate triumph of his gospel of Empire Free Trade. He has preached this policy with an almost religious fervour. He is a Scot, founder and proprietor of the *Daily Express* with its over two million readers, and he has sacrificed leisure, comfort, money, and popularity to the cause he believes in. His dour determination and passionate sincerity have made him what Alan Breck would call 'a bonnie fechter.' It was he who gave the revolt in the Tory Party its effective direction and most powerful drive. When he joined the attack on the Government and put the power of his popular Press behind the attack, and above all when he persuaded Bonar Law to take a hand, the fate of the Coalition was sealed. Lord Beaverbrook's challenge to the Coalition was not on personal but on patriotic grounds. With complete consistency he was leading an agitation against Britain's participation in foreign troubles. 'This is the principle which he has since advocated so strenuously, as the determining factor in our relations with foreign states. He had become very much disturbed with the dangerous position into which this country was drifting. He had been to the East and the situation there alarmed him. He saw the imminent danger of Britain's being drawn into a Greco-Turkish war on the side of Greece. He hurried home to use all his powerful resources in the cause of peace. He appealed to Lloyd George, Lord Birkenhead, and Winston Churchill, that is the triumvirate which dominated the Coalition Cabinet, to come to terms with the Turkish Government. Failing to move them he sought out Bonar Law in his retirement and swept him into action with the sensational slogan, 'These men mean War.'



GABRIEL MACDONALD: "PARDON ME, BUT YOU'RE SITTING ON MY TRUMPET."

## THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD

With regard to this major issue of peace or war Baldwin's attitude was ambiguous and with double sense deluding. Beaverbrook says :

‘ Mr. Baldwin himself was in favour of the Chanak policy of Mr. Lloyd George's Government. He was hostile to the conciliatory manœuvres of General Harington, which averted prompt warfare. He defended the Constantinople policy of the Government to Bonar Law, yet he was also in favour of breaking up the Lloyd George Coalition Government. Mr. Baldwin moved in the direction of Conservative independence when the immediate risk of war had been removed.’<sup>1</sup>

Lord Ronaldshay says that when Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in the Lloyd George Cabinet, wrote to Lord Curzon denouncing the Near Eastern policy of the Coalition, he was acting on behalf of Baldwin. If these two noble lords are to be believed as witnesses it would appear that Baldwin was not sitting on the fence but being on both sides simultaneously. Perhaps he had the faculty of Sir Boyle Roche's Hibernian bird of being in two places at one time.

The devotion of Lord Beaverbrook to Bonar Law was one of those classic friendships in public life that belong to an earlier, a less sophisticated age. Certainly the influence of Beaverbrook was so great that it compelled Bonar Law to take at this critical time a sensational step. He wrote a letter to *The Times* declaring that Britain could not act as ‘ the policeman of the world alone.’ This was a complete condemnation, indeed a vote of no confidence, in the Government and proved the death-knell of the Coalition Administration. That the head of one section of a coalition should, off his own bat, so to speak, thus act independently was sensational. It was regarded as Bonar Law's definite break with the Coalition Government. It was hailed as a call to the Conservatives to come out and stand independently. It showed that a Conservative Government was the alternative, and here was the leader, waiting the call to lead it.

The call came at one of the most extraordinary meetings

<sup>1</sup> *Politicians and the Press*, by Lord Beaverbrook, p. 51.

## DEATH WATCH BEETLE IN THE RAFTERS

that any political party ever had. The crowd that filled the famous Carlton Club, London, was composed of Conservative Members of the House of Commons and Conservative Peers who were Ministers of the Coalition Government. The fact that Mr. Bonar Law went to this meeting, which was quite openly convened for the purpose of ending the Coalition, showed how successful Beaverbrook's advocacy had been.

'Had he not gone,' says Beaverbrook, 'Mr. Austen Chamberlain, as the official leader, would simply have broken the Conservative Party neatly into two halves—one for Lloyd George and one for Independence—and of this certainty the *Daily Express* publicly warned Mr. Chamberlain. Bonar Law's appearance spelt the difference between a fiasco and a triumph.'

The meeting assembled in an atmosphere of crisis. Those who favoured Coalition were fortunate in their chairman. Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who presided, made a strong, impressive appeal for the continuance of the Coalition. Speaking with all the weight of prestige that a great name confers and with the authority that great service to a Party assures, he counselled his discontented colleagues to patience and delay. The real issue, he urged, was not between Liberal and Conservative, but between those who stood for individual freedom and those who were out for a grave, economic and political change; those who stood by the Constitution against the disruptive elements of Socialism and revolution. In the election before them, Liberal and Conservative should maintain the closest and most cordial co-operation in the interest of their mutual safety.

Then Mr. Stanley Baldwin spoke, and it was the most sensational speech of his life. It was characteristic in its candour, impressive with its dynamic force. At first there was surprise. Here was a dark horse, forcing its way through a huddle of horses and challenging the leaders. This man had been so conspicuous for his silence that his colleagues in the Cabinet wondered if it were due to his subtlety or stupidity. His speech was just the kind of speech which, in after years, Members of Parliament listened to with delight. Outwardly it had no flourishes, no hidden meaning, but seemed entirely

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candid, with the evidence of absolute sincerity—a plain, unvarnished tale. I am no orator as Brutus is, but I can deliver the goods, he seemed to say. ‘I am a plain, blunt man.’

This was his line. Lloyd George was a dynamic force; therefore, dangerous. See how he had smashed the Liberal Party. He would do the same to their Party. He had already alienated an important section of their Party. He was a trouble-maker.

‘Why, he has even made trouble between you and me, Mr. Chamberlain—we who are like brothers. He has come between us—so much so, that here you are prepared to go into the wilderness if you are compelled to forsake him, and I am prepared to go into the wilderness if I should be compelled to stay with him. This dissension will spread. It must be stopped.’

It is to be noted that in Baldwin’s attack on Lloyd George, he never sought to found his case upon the high ground of public policy, but on the lower ground of party advantage. This man comes between me and my leader—away with him!

Baldwin dared not say that he differed on policy. If he had given that as his reason the retort would have come swift and sure: Why then didn’t you resign?

It is reported that before this memorable meeting Baldwin had met his wife on her return from Aix-les-Bains—he had hurried home before her—and told her that he had made up his mind to oppose his senior colleagues and so risk dismissal from the Cabinet.

‘I could do nothing else,’ he said, ‘I’m going out of politics for good.’ It is difficult to see how he risked anything. He knew the feeling of the rank and file of the Party. He knew that Bonar Law’s letter to *The Times* was the death-blow of the Coalition. He knew that Beaverbrook had persuaded Bonar Law, the linch-pin of the Coalition, the best-beloved Tory of them all, to make a personal appearance at the Carlton Club meeting and support the break-up of the Coalition. Finally, he knew that Sir George Younger, the far-sighted Chairman of the Conservative organization, had reported that if the Conservatives fought the election as an Independent Party, they would win a complete success.



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How could the greatest political strategist of his generation, the man who was always tapping the political weather-glass, be so deceived as to imagine that to shout with the crowd would mean the end of his political life?

The result was a foregone conclusion. When Bonar Law supported Baldwin there seemed no more to be said. The decision to smash the Coalition was carried by a majority of a hundred votes. Within a few hours of this meeting Lloyd George was turning away a deputation from No. 10 Downing Street with the remark that he was no longer able to keep his engagement with them because he was no longer Prime Minister.

As an epilogue to this tragi-comedy, it may be said that although the conclusion that each side reached and the action recommended differed absolutely, the arguments of Austen Chamberlain and Bonar Law were almost identical. For Tory and Liberal to remain together would divide the nation into two clear-cut parties: Labour versus the Rest. There is a danger of Labour becoming the Government, said Austen, therefore keep the Coalition. There is a danger of Labour becoming the Government, said Bonar Law, therefore scrap the Coalition. Each reached a contrary conclusion from the parallel premises. Bonar Law's case was the more logically presented. He argued that it would be a mistake to have Labour on one side and Liberal and Tory on the other. That would isolate Labour as the only opposition, the Official Opposition, therefore, in the event of the coalition of Liberal and Tory being defeated, Labour would be the alternative Government. He saw the danger of the people becoming used to regarding Labour as the alternative Government. That was a *contretemps* which he wanted particularly to avoid: far better have the old party divisions where the voter had more than one choice. Austen Chamberlain warned the meeting that the downfall of the Coalition might lead to the rise of a Socialist administration. Bonar Law said: 'Whatever the result of the election, I personally have no fear of a Labour Government coming in.' This was said in October 1922. Fifteen months later a Labour Government was in Office.

What Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain could not foresee was that the rise of the Labour Party would inevitably bring a

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new political alignment in this country. Experience did in the end teach the Tory Party that there was no chance of success in fighting Labour as a single party, but that the coalition with Liberals was the only way. But it took nine years to learn that lesson.

In the General Election that followed the break-up of the Coalition, the political pendulum, whose erratic oscillation holds the anxious eyes of ambitious politicians, took a violent swing to the Left. The Labour Party put 414 candidates in the field, 53 more than in 1918 and won 142 seats. In 1918, Labour had polled 2,244,945 votes ; in 1922, Labour polled 4,235,457. That Labour had almost doubled its poll and increased its representation in the House of Commons by 67 seats was an indication of its increasing popularity. The result was a political sensation. That a party of 142 pledged to Socialism should be returned to the House of Commons caused no small alarm among the other two Parties. There was great anxiety as to what these new Members would do—so different in type from the Members to whom the House had been accustomed.

The Parliament that met on 23 November 1922 was a strange body. Notable figures had gone ; others who would catch the public eye in the days to come had been gained. The Prime Minister was Bonar Law, a rare and lovable personality, but melancholy, without inspiration or leadership. He was not to be blamed for this, as few men have suffered more. Tragedy had followed his entering into politics and darkened his outlook on life. He was not a forceful person ; indeed, Asquith once sneered at him as 'meekly ambitious,' whilst Lloyd George had referred to him as 'honest to the point of simplicity.' He had had three lucky chances. First of all, he was lucky to be elected Member of Parliament in that hotbed of Socialism, the Tradeston division of Glasgow. At Westminster, he attracted attention at once. He was the only man in that House, except, of course, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain and Mr. Balfour, who could make an intelligent speech on Tariff Reform. Joe hailed the fluent Scot as a gift from the gods. Here was a man with an amazing memory who, without a note, could reel off whole tables of figures with ridiculous ease. He could be violent,

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too, for all his deadly dullness. His second lucky chance was when Lord Balfour took him into his Government in 1902 as an alternative to Churchill and thereby changed the course of political history. His third chance came when, pushed by Lord Beaverbrook, a brother Scot, he slid into the Premiership between Mr. Walter Long and Mr. Austen Chamberlain.

On the Ulster question he was an extremist and, indeed, joined with Carson in promoting the revolt in Ulster. Nevertheless, he was popular with everyone. He hit hard, but somehow no one resented it. He could be vituperative with a deprecatory apology and abusive with a sad smile. Before he entered Parliament he was a prominent member of the 'iron ring' at the Royal Exchange, Glasgow. All the ironmongers thought he was a great politician, and all the politicians thought he was a great ironmonger. He was the hope of the 'Hard Faces,' the industrialists' dream come true—the Business Man Prime Minister.

When Bonar Law resigned the Premiership it was thought that Lord Curzon would take his place. The Foreign Secretary himself thought so. One of the most pathetic pictures of our political history is that of Lord and Lady Curzon travelling up from Somerset to London on receipt of an urgent telegram from Lord Stamfordham, the King's Private Secretary. They discussed their future plans, how they would use No. 10 Downing Street, the official residence of Prime Ministers. 'We shall still live and entertain at Carlton House Terrace. I shall remain Curzon even though Prime Minister.'<sup>1</sup> Then came the blow. *Baldwin had been appointed Prime Minister.* The dream of a lifetime dissipated. Heart-broken he collapsed into a chair. Lady Curzon tried to console him. He wept. He had forgotten Baldwin. Nobody had ever thought of him. 'Not even a public figure,' sobbed Curzon. 'A man of no experience. And of the utmost insignificance.'<sup>2</sup>

Curzon had been likened to an eagle: he had compared Baldwin to a beetle, and in the end:

*'Often to our comfort shall we find  
The sharded beetle in a safer hold  
Than is the full-winged eagle.'*

<sup>1</sup> *Curzon: The Last Phase*, by Harold Nicolson, pp. 354 and 355.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*ROOM 14, 1922*

**T**he meeting when the newly elected Members of Parliament came together in 1922 was one of the most momentous in the history of the British Labour Movement. It was held in the House of Commons in the large Committee room upstairs. This Committee room is famous as the one in which Lord Kitchener addressed a secret meeting of Members of Parliament during one of the gravest crises in the War. A memorial tablet on the wall behind the Chairman's seat records the fact.

On Tuesday, 21 November 1922, the Labour Members gathered there in great spirits. The atmosphere was electric. Each Member had achieved the great honour of winning a contested election and not yet got used to his triumph. A large number of them were there for the first time. Everything was new and strange. This was the first meeting of the new Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons, and the business was of the utmost importance. They were excited at the prospect before them. They had come to Parliament to fight a great fight, and that day they were to choose their leader. Mr. J. R. Clynes took the chair. He had been Chairman for only a few months, having succeeded Mr. William Adamson, who had been Chairman of the Party during the War period.

The Parliamentary Party numbered 142, of whom only 22 were absent. This fact is important, in view of the closeness of the vote that followed. Clynes opened the meeting with a few words of welcome. Now it happened that the first item on the agenda raised a question which, although seemingly of little importance, is held by some to have been a decisive factor in the election of Ramsay MacDonald as Chairman. The question was the allocation of seats in the House. This

being the first Parliament since the break-up of the Coalition Government, the different parties—Tories, Liberals, and Labour—were expected to take up their traditional places in the House when it met at three o'clock that afternoon. But here a difficulty arose. The Liberals, although a mere handful, had staked a claim for places on the Front Opposition Bench. Clynes reported that, in view of the necessity for taking immediate action with regard to making arrangements as to the Party's position in the House, he and such Members of the Policy Committee who had been re-elected had been in consultation with the Speaker. They were gratified to learn that he proposed to give precedence in all important debates to the Leader of the Labour Party, and that on the Leader of the Labour Party would devolve the duty of questioning the Government as to the course of business. This meant that, every Thursday, it would be the privilege of the Leader of the Labour Party to ask the Government for a detailed programme of the business for the following week.

One of the most important duties of an Opposition is the privilege of initiating discussion on any subject in which it is interested. The Opposition is usually allocated certain days on which to raise any question. With the Opposition divided as in this case, these Supply days, as they are called, are allocated to each section in proportion to their numbers.

The Speaker now proposed to allow three days out of every four to the Labour Party, the fourth being given either to the Asquithian Liberals or the Lloyd George Liberals. He could not, however, see his way to agree to the proposal that the Labour Party should occupy the major portion of the Opposition Front Bench, leaving about four or five seats from the gangway and to the dispatch box to Mr. Asquith and his colleagues and giving a few seats in the second bench to the Independent (Asquithian) Whips.

Clynes, in his quiet way, told the story of the interview with the Speaker and assured the meeting that he had expressed strong disapproval of the proposed arrangement. It was plain that Clynes did not regard the matter as of much importance ; he was evidently convinced that the Speaker had definitely made up his mind that the Liberals should have this concession and that nothing that he could do would

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make him change. The demeanour of Clynes disappointed the meeting. In this first meeting of the Parliamentary Party, reporting the first encounter of the Session with the Speaker, he seemed to have been too easily put off and to be advising them to accept defeat.

Meanwhile MacDonald was sitting by, watching. He knew he was, later on, to be proposed as Chairman. He knew that it was to be a fight between Clynes and himself. He seized the opportunity and rose to his feet. His intervention caused more excitement. He launched a vigorous and uncompromising opposition to the Speaker's proposal. With his uncanny instinct in sensing the mood of a meeting—an instinct that stood him in good stead at many a Party Conference—he strongly protested against any compromise with the Liberals. Let the Liberals join the Tories on the other side of the House. That was where they belonged, anyway.

Of course, MacDonald, from his twelve years' experience of Parliament and his wide knowledge of Parliamentary procedure, was perfectly aware that the Speaker's word was law and that there was not the remotest chance of making him change his mind. He saw, however, this opportunity of getting into the eye of the meeting, ingratiating himself with the more energetic and extreme members of the Party as a man of action, and making a strong contrast with the alleged defeatism of his rival. The meeting swayed to his side. It was resolved that a letter be sent to the Speaker insisting on the Labour Party's right as the largest Party in Opposition to the exclusive use of the Front Bench and of the benches immediately behind. It was also decided that a letter be sent to Mr. Asquith, stating the Party's view.

The climax of the meeting was reached when the Chairman announced that the next item on the agenda was the election of officers. Excitement was intense, as it was moved that the officers of last Session who had been re-elected to Parliament should carry on for the time being, that vacancies be filled, and that the election of officers be postponed to the New Year, when it could be taken in accordance with the new system of ballot originated in the previous year. This was a tactful manoeuvre on the part of MacDonald's opponents. It was the usual strategy of a section afraid of defeat. It is good

tactics to postpone decision, in the hope that time may make a change. Delays maintain hope ; decisions destroy it. This move, if agreed to, would leave MacDonald out. Those who favoured MacDonald had, therefore, to act quickly. They at once moved an amendment that all officers be elected now for this Session and the Session beginning in the following year. A show of hands ; the amendment was declared carried. First win to the MacDonald Party ! The momentous choice of Chairman had to be made by those present without the advocacy of anyone on behalf of either side. There sat Clynes and MacDonald ; members had to choose between them. First of all, there was the cleavage between the political side as represented by the Independent Labour Party and the industrial side as represented by the Trade Unionists. The Independent Labour Party was the spear-point of the Labour and Socialist Movement in this country. Its members were on the extreme Left—determined Socialists, out for change, drastic and immediate. It had among them the best speakers and the most notable leaders, and had, indeed, been founded by a Socialist of international reputation, Keir Hardie.

Most of those voting were members of the Independent Labour Party. Its status and prestige, as compared with the Trade Union section, would give its nominee an overwhelming advantage, if personal issues were not raised. MacDonald was a member of the I.L.P. and had been its Chairman. Clynes was also a member of the I.L.P. Many of the Trade Unionists present were also members of the I.L.P., and their vote would be cast between MacDonald and Clynes according as they stressed their Trade Unionism or political affiliation.

As the rank and file of the movement, political and industrial alike, had come round to the view that the War was a crime, MacDonald's War record was much more in his favour than against him. MacDonald was a Scot ; Clynes was of Irish descent. The Scot has a reputation in England, and, moreover, the Scots contingent present at the meeting was large and contained many notables. Personally, Clynes was regarded as a typical Trade Union leader ; MacDonald was regarded as essentially an intellectual and a Socialist. MacDonald was a tremendous personality, in contrast with the shy, undistinguished Clynes. MacDonald, too, was a celebrity, and

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Clynes comparatively unknown. MacDonald was of a commanding figure, tall, handsome, with an air of dignity, authority and distinction. He looked a fighting leader. Clynes was small, modest and unobtrusive. MacDonald was above all an orator who could command the applause of 'listening Senates' and hold the House in thrall with the potency of his personality and the power of his perorations.

Mr. Arthur Henderson and Mr. J. H. Thomas, two powerful Trade Union leaders, supported Clynes against MacDonald. Snowden was in a desperate dilemma; he had always opposed MacDonald. He was against MacDonald being nominated in the first place, as he feared that MacDonald's unpopularity would be injurious to the Party. Nor could he vote for Clynes. One of the most sensational scenes ever witnessed at a Labour Party Conference was the violent attack by Snowden on Clynes on the occasion of the break-up of the Asquith Coalition. On that occasion, Clynes made a spirited reply and held Snowden up to public ridicule. For Snowden it was now a question of deciding which of his adversaries he disliked more. Which was the lesser of the two evils? In the end, like Henderson and Thomas, he cast his vote for Clynes.

On nominations for the position of Chairman being called for, Shinwell proposed MacDonald. Clynes was also nominated. As the Chairman was a candidate, he vacated the chair during the voting, and Arthur Henderson, the Chief Whip, took his place.

The vote to be taken was important not only to MacDonald and Clynes, but to the whole Labour Movement, and, as it turns out, to the country itself. The Members of Parliament on that day did not realize what tremendous consequences their decisions would imply. They thought that they were merely electing a Party Chairman; they were really choosing the future Prime Minister of the British Empire. But there was one there who by a curious 'second sight' had come to see the significance of the vote and had realized that his future career hung in the balance.

In short, we, a fighting Party, a Party of revolt, wanted a fighting leader—one who was fearless and knew what he and we wanted, and knew how to get it.

While the counting was taking place, MacDonald sat with



a gleam of excitement in his eyes and drummed on the desk in front of him, in a way he had when labouring under nervous excitement. It was known that the voting would be close. The result was : Clynes, 56 ; MacDonald, 61 ; majority for MacDonald, 5. The election of MacDonald was then put as a substantive motion and carried *nemine contradicente*.

The result of the election was a surprise. In spite of so much in his favour, the support MacDonald received was remarkably small. It would be idle to speculate as to how many of the votes cast for MacDonald were merely votes against Clynes.

Clynes took his defeat with a generous sportsmanship. MacDonald, writing in the *Socialist Review*, acknowledged the unselfish magnanimity of his defeated rival. 'I care most of all,' he wrote, 'for spirit and goodwill. I would rather that some damage were done by over-zealousness than that we should have a tranquillity of repression. I am not afraid of groups ; I am afraid of men being left to do nothing. In this connection, I take the opportunity of doing homage to my predecessor in office, Mr. Clynes. His loyalty has been magnificent, and has set for everyone an example so conspicuously fine that no one can fail to be moved by it. If it be that fate has success in its keeping for the Party, no one will have contributed more to that than Mr. Clynes. In what I myself felt it my duty to do, I was moved by what I considered were the best interests of the Party, and Mr. Clynes as a colleague has been perfect. If I succeed in what I have placed before me to do, I shall want no harvest, except the happiness in my own mind of having given Labour a Parliamentary position of power ; others must come in and complete the work, as, in the course of nature, that can hardly be reserved for me now.'

Clynes set loyalty to the Party far above personal ambition. As a chairman during a very difficult time, he might reasonably have expected that the reward for his services would be the leadership. But when the vote went against him, not only had he no complaints, but he acknowledged the wisdom of the choice. MacDonald, rising amid loud cheers, offered a few words of thanks to the Parliamentary Party for the honour it had done him in electing him as Chairman and Leader. He suggested that it would be a good thing to have a Deputy

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Leader and expressed the hope that Clynes would see his way to accept nomination. Here again Clynes showed to advantage. He accepted nomination and was declared elected unanimously. MacDonald intimated that in the previous Parliament there had been two Vice-Chairmen. It was moved that there be three Vice-Chairmen. This motion was put and declared lost. Stephen Walsh was nominated as senior Vice-Chairman, and it was carried unanimously. J. H. Thomas and Josiah Wedgwood were nominated for the position of second Vice-Chairman, and, on a vote being taken, the result was as follows : for Josiah Wedgwood, 53 ; for J. H. Thomas, 44 ; majority for Wedgwood, 9. This result was suggestive. It showed the steadily growing unpopularity of J. H. Thomas among the Members of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

It may be readily admitted that no one at that meeting realized the great importance that MacDonald's victory was to have in his life. It made him Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, which meant that he was the head of the alternative government. It set him straight on the path that led ultimately to the Premiership. Who, knowing MacDonald's forecasting habit, will be in doubt that he had every step planned and every development anticipated. We now know that he had set the Premiership as his goal. As leader of a large and a growing Party, what could now arise to thwart his ambition ?

The allocation of those seats to the Liberals had a ridiculous sequel, which Members on both sides used to watch with much amusement. To a House crowded, as it always is at question time, MacDonald used to make an ostentatious entry. He picked his way along the narrow space between the table and the knees of his seated colleagues. His Parliamentary Private Secretary, in close attendance, paralleled on the second bench the course of his Chief. When the Leader of the Opposition reached his appointed place, he invariably found that Mr. Asquith had forestalled him. Now the Liberal leader had very little room for himself and his little flock. There were more men eager for the honour of Front Bench prestige than there were places to put them in. This overcrowding of a congested area forced Mr. Asquith to obtrude an inch or two into the territory of his political opponent.

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MacDonald, jealous of every inch of space, would sit down right against Asquith's side and gradually contrive to push him along the bench. While MacDonald pushed to the left, Asquith resisted towards the right. There they were, these two great statesmen, 'pull devil pull baker,' momentum against mass, the irresistible force meeting the immovable body, to the diversion of all present. Reporters in the Press Gallery watched the ludicrous comedy with sardonic smiles.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *MACDONALD'S COME-BACK*

**I**t was a great occasion when the new Parliament met at Westminster after the 1922 election. Evidence of change met the eye everywhere. New men occupied the seats of the mighty. New faces were on the Treasury Bench, and new faces were on the Opposition Front Bench.

The Coalition had gone, with its personal antagonisms. Mr. Bonar Law, the first Tory Prime Minister for sixteen years, now led the Conservative cohorts. Mr. Lloyd George, the great War Premier, had gone from the place of honour. He had crossed the floor and was sitting among his small band of faithful followers, 'below the gangway' on the Opposition side. Side by side with him in embarrassing propinquity sat the Asquithian Liberals—so near and yet so far. Mr. Austen Chamberlain, out of office for the first time for many years, sat remote from the Treasury Bench. He emphasized his disagreement with the Ministry by sitting 'below the gangway' on the Government side of the House. He disagreed with the Government, but not sufficiently to warrant his crossing the floor and joining the official Opposition. With him in his exile were those faithful few who opposed the break-up of the Coalition and resigned office—rather than accept that policy. The attitude of those banished Tories towards the Bonar Law administration was critical, rather than hostile.

The Irish Party had gone. The formation of the Irish Free State has robbed the House of Commons of the oddest, rarest, most picturesque, eccentric, and nondescript band of Ishmaelites that ever enlivened the torpidity of that deadly dull assembly. No more can the 'story' of a hilarious 'Irish night,' with its wild scenes of tumult, the brogue of Connemara leading the chorus, be splashed scross the front page of the morning paper, a joy to John Bull as he sips his matutinal coffee.

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John Redmond, William O'Brien, John Dillon, Tim Healy, and the other giants of Hibernian oratory shall never more be heard here. One only of the old Nationalist brigade remained, a veteran of the bad old days, the ever-popular, benevolent T. P. O'Connor, the Father of the House. He sat in genial dignity in a corner seat on the Opposition side, alone, behind the Liberal Party, beside the Labour Party, but unconnected with either.

Most remarkable of all is the emergence of the Labour Party. For them it was the beginning of a new era. Twenty years before, the aggregate vote obtained by members of the Labour Party was 62,698, and the seats won numbered two. In this 1922 election, the votes polled for Labour were 4,200,000, and the seats won were 142. Those figures show the steady advance of Labour. In the 1918 election, in which MacDonald had lost his seat, the Party, in spite of the unprecedented difficulties of that extraordinary election, polled no fewer than 2,244,945 votes. The progress from the time when Keir Hardie stood alone in the House of Commons representing organized labour, until now when 142 keen, capable, and enthusiastic Members had been returned, had never halted.

The election itself had made a great change. Never before had the Labour Party been the official Opposition. The fact that its strength warranted this recognition was of tremendous political importance. Two leaders of the Conservative Party had foreseen and feared this eventuality, Mr. Austen Chamberlain and Mr. Bonar Law. At the famous Carlton Club meeting, Mr. Austen Chamberlain had warned his Party that the real enemy was Socialism and that they must maintain the Coalition Government and thereby have the help of the Liberal Party against this common danger. There is no doubt that Mr. Austen Chamberlain was right. The differences between Conservative and Liberal were not such as made the weakening of the defence against the peril of Socialism desirable. His warning was disregarded, and the result was before them in the fact that the Liberals in the new Parliament were a mere fragment, whereas the Socialists were strong beyond belief—so strong, indeed, that they had attained the authority and dignity of His Majesty's Opposition.

It is vital to remember that the Conservative and Liberal

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Parties were defending established positions against the attack of the comparatively new and inexperienced Labour Party, and the Labour Party's success in the election must be measured not only by what it gained, but by what other Parties lost. For the first time in British history, the Liberal and Conservative Parties lost their ascendancy. The traditional political pendulum had hitherto oscillated from Tweedledum Tory to Tweedledee Liberal. Until the day when Liberal joins the Tory, political speakers and writers will have to invent a new simile.

The installing of MacDonald as the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition was fraught with far-reaching consequences, both for the Labour Party and for himself. For Labour it meant the status and authority of the alternative Government, but it meant more. It meant that they were putting into the hands of MacDonald a power which they found it almost impossible to rescind and which, in the end, was destined to bring the British Labour Movement to the verge of ruin.

To MacDonald it was a gift of all that he cherished most. It was fame; it was recognition, restitution, rehabilitation. Hitherto he had received the idolization of his followers, and had been recognized as a considerable force in the political life of the country. Now he had reached the heights, with the prospect clear before him of reaching the highest pinnacle that any citizen in this democracy can reach, the Prime Ministership.

MacDonald sat in a place of honour on the Front Opposition Bench. On his left, sharing the honours of that historic bench, was the veteran leader, Mr. Asquith. On his right, closely crowded, were the prominent members of the Labour Party—many of them Labour leaders who had graduated from the soap-box to the green benches. Immediately in front, over the Treasury box, he saw the sad face of Mr. Bonar Law, the new Prime Minister.

The old-world ceremony of selecting the Speaker came first, but in this quaint procedure MacDonald had no interest. The duty of congratulating the new Speaker on his appointment fell to the Labour Opposition, but he left it to Mr. Clynes. After all, Clynes had been in the House continuously for sixteen years, while he had just come back after a rather

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unfortunate interregnum. Clynes, who had been Chairman of the Party, would do quite correctly a little formal job like that. MacDonald was reserving himself for the big task. He had to make one of the most important speeches of his life.

What sort of reception would he get when he rose to make his speech? He recalled a memorable occasion, when he had to make an important speech in the most critical time in the nation's history in August 1914. He recalled his terrible experience then. He had never forgotten how the House had mistaken his intention and purpose, and had turned against him. Eight years of ostracism and persecution had followed that unfortunate speech. Now was his chance to remove the stigma of 'traitor,' so often applied to him in the intervening years—his chance to rehabilitate himself, to make his 'come-back.' Ever since the result of the election was known, he had been thinking about his re-entrance to the House. Ever since his election as Chairman, when he knew that, on this day, he would have to make the official speech, he had sought with Celtic foresight to visualize the scene and to plan what his speech would be. It should be a speech of reassurance, moderation, a speech of conciliation—in short, a speech of the Right.

The occasion of the speech was propitious. On this, the first day of a new Parliament, Members had gathered in a rather excited mood. The atmosphere was cheerful and friendly. If there was any hostility present, and none was evident, it was the party antagonism of Labour Members to their political opponents, and due rather to the fervour of their enthusiasm than to any ill-feeling. To-day, at least, the proceedings did not call for the clash of Party warfare. They resembled more the stately ceremonial flourishes that precede a fencing bout. This simile was evidently in the mind of Mr. Asquith, as, later, he said that it was a tradition of the first night of the Debate on the Address to 'keep the gloves on and our foils well buttoned.'

When two gentlemen in Court dress had spoken their pieces, the Speaker called 'Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.' The Leader of the Opposition rose briskly, stood at the table, laid his notes on the dispatch box and faced the House. The murmur of conversation stilled on the instant. MacDonald set the tone in his first words. Referring to the two nervous

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neophytes who had just spoken, he said : 'To use a hackneyed word in no hackneyed frame of mind, they have been charming.' Maintaining the lighter vein, he borrowed a metaphor from the theatre to characterize the Government :

'We have been accustomed, in the occasional visits we have made of a playgoing character, to see death on the stage becoming very active life in the green-room immediately after. The late Government died on the stage. It went to the dressing-room, changed some of its superficial clothing and its name, and, behold, it is in front of us now.'

He understood that the Session was to be short, the House having been called together to deal with Irish affairs.

'I return,' he said, 'to this House after four years' absence. There is a strange familiarity about the place, even, I am glad to say, in the Front Bench, but I almost pinch myself to assure myself that I am not dreaming. What a strange, magical transformation has taken place in the opinions of right hon. gentlemen opposite. All my parliamentary life has been summed up in the Irish controversy and its consequences. I can remember the right hon. gentleman standing where I stand now and my right hon. friend sitting where the right hon. gentleman sits now, and I can remember those furious onslaughts. I can remember when the very name of the Party was changed in order that they might nail to the mast the flag of Unionism. Hon. Members are there, but where is the Party? Where is the name? The right hon. gentleman has been so inconsistent as to say that it is a Unionist Party. He knows perfectly well that, when the division takes place on the Irish legislation, if it were only the Unionist Party that was to vote, he would be left in a miserable minority. Moreover, he went further. I have heard the right hon. gentleman from this box threaten the country with civil war.'

Proceeding, he told how, for forty years, the Irish controversy had held up all other legislation in this country. Social reforms had been postponed, and now the Conservative leaders said : 'We have been wrong all the time ; we have wasted the political life of this country all these precious



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years.' He continued : ' Now they ask the House to pass an Act which only a year or two ago they would have called separatism, and which they would have said should be supplemented by a mutiny in the Army.' The moral of that was that there was a fear that we might go too far, that our experiments would be too rash. ' Who reads the history of the last forty years,' said MacDonald, ' will see that the danger is not too much haste, but too little.'

His attitude on the Irish question was :

' We will do all we can to help to hasten to a close this old bad chapter of Irish relations with this country, and we will do it in the faith that, in closing that chapter, we are opening one which will be happier for Ireland and more honourable to this country. The word that will go from this House to Ireland is that, in doing this act of reparation to Ireland, Ireland becomes free to give what it likes and to withhold what it likes, and it may give as a gift the affection to this country that it has always refused to give.'

As to unemployment, he declared :

' After all these ameliorative measures that have been brought in, after all the millions of pounds that have been spent upon them, your streets to-day witness processions of unemployed, and your official records show that 1,300,000 people are still requiring those ameliorative measures.'

A Tory Member shouted loudly : ' What would you do ? ' MacDonald's answer was to appeal to Mr. Bonar Law to do something to allay the agitation that was gathering up in connection with his refusal to see the deputation of unemployed men who were in London at that time. The reference was to the ' hunger marchers,' as they were called, of the unemployed in London. There had been some indignation expressed by prominent Labour leaders at the treatment meted out to the marchers. Mr. Bonar Law had refused to see these men and had referred them to the Minister of Labour, whose department had to deal with unemployment. MacDonald appealed to the Prime Minister not to assume a merely ' red tape attitude,' but to show some imagination, and for once, in

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the circumstances, yield to the request and meet the marchers' deputation.

The line of attack taken by the Conservatives during the election had been to stir up panic by associating the Labour Party with revolution and bloodshed. Russia was now, as always, the bogey. The Labour candidates were wild men, seeking to destroy the very fabric of the State. Many of them were alleged to be in the pay of the Soviet Republic of Russia. There is no doubt as regards the effectiveness of those tactics and the tremendous impression that they had on MacDonald. Even he had been called a Bolshevist, and he resented it so keenly that he devoted the most important part of this speech to its rebuttal. The best defence is attack, and his attack was a *tu quoque*. 'Who are you Tories, who would accuse us of Bolshevism and disorder. I have memories.' Pointing to Mr. Ronald McNeill (later Lord Cushendun), he suggested that he should rise and give his testimony of a strange behaviour in this House. The reference was, of course, to an extraordinary scene that took place in the House of Commons in November 1912. It was during the Tory campaign against Home Rule. There had been a snap division, and the Liberal Government had been defeated. A Tory amendment dealing with a small financial point in a Government Bill had been carried. The Tories had been lying in wait for the Government and brought forward this amendment. Suddenly a 'snap' division was rushed, and the Government was defeated. Next day Asquith moved to rescind the amendment that had been carried. Then pandemonium broke loose. The Conservatives stood and howled in fury. The Speaker sought in vain to still the uproar. The scene was beyond description. The incoherent howling gradually developed into a continuous chant: 'Ad-journ! Ad-journ!' shouted to a rhythmical beat. After many attempts to obtain order, the Speaker did the only thing possible; he adjourned the House. If possible, the din and angry altercations grew worse, and suddenly a huge Conservative, the gigantic McNeill, lifted a book from the table and hurled it across with terrific force at Winston Churchill. It struck Churchill full in the face. The incident shocked everyone into silence. As Churchill made no attempt to retaliate, the House slowly emptied. The chief actor in

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that scene had later been appointed Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, an office of great responsibility and importance, and was actually sitting beside the Prime Minister at that moment. MacDonald challenged him to rise in his place and tell the House about that little incident. Then he turned on Mr. Bonar Law. What had he done? MacDonald hoped that he would not shock constitutionalists in the House if he read a quotation from the Official Report in which Mr. Bonar Law had boasted that the opposition to Home Rule had gone so far that there was in Ulster at that moment 'a great army,' and that army had been formed, openly and avowedly formed, for the express purpose of resisting by arms submission to a Dublin Parliament. In reply to an interjection from a Liberal Minister, Mr. Bonar Law had said that he gave his full acquiescence to this armed revolt.

After that effective reference to Conservative rowdiness, MacDonald went on to point the moral.

'In some ways,' he said, 'these are matters which one would desire to forget. I hope that we will forget them. But it is necessary sometimes to remind hon. Members opposite of their own parentage and of their own past. In those days—one speaks seriously and feels seriously—when I sat opposite and saw the right hon. gentleman standing or sitting here, aiding and abetting that kind of thing, I had visions that these doctrines and that conduct might embarrass the feet of those who would be his successors. The right hon. gentleman then seemed to me to be snipping, snipping away with the shears, at those tender cords of consent, restraint, and good sense that alone keep the complicated fabric of civilized and international relationships together. I shall never be a party to such conduct.'

A loud guffaw from the Conservative benches stopped him. He turned towards the House and intimated that he had no objection to the people of the country knowing that the Conservatives regarded disorder as a fit subject for laughter.

In his peroration, he laid down a course of conduct for the future both for himself and the Party:

'We shall do our best to state our case in home affairs, in all their great perplexity, and in foreign affairs in their

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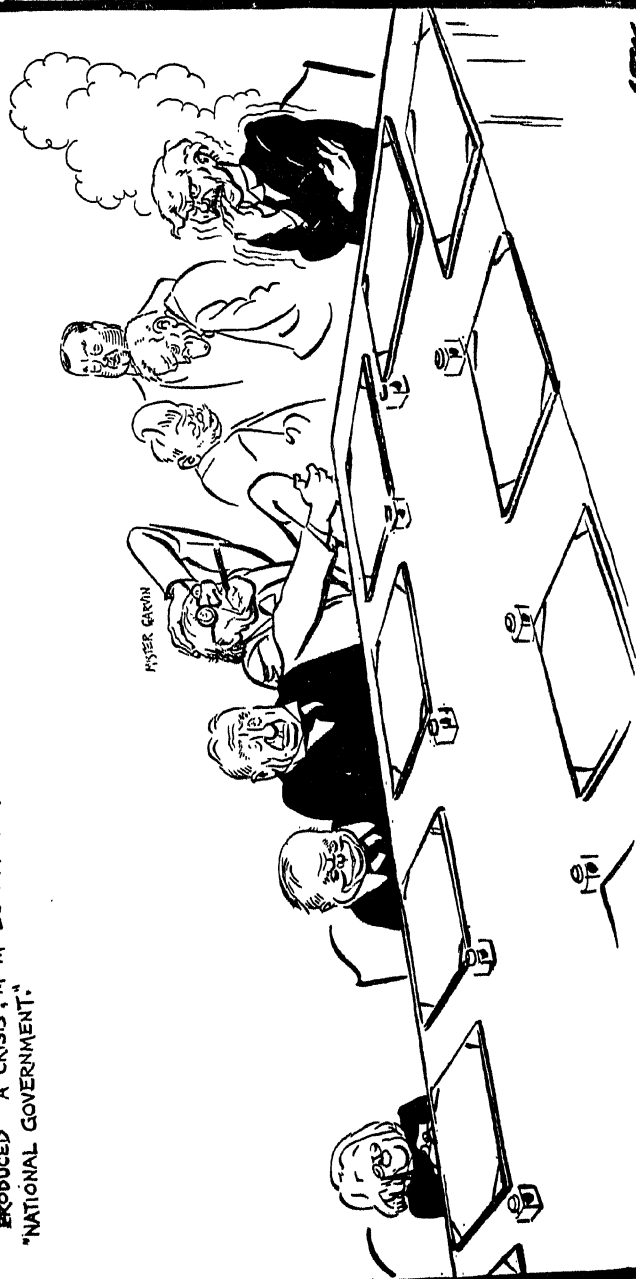
still greater perplexity ; and I ask from you --and I know that I will get it--and I ask from the right hon. gentleman and his followers on the other side of the House that fair play, that generosity of treatment, which no man doing his best has ever been denied by this House.'

Mr. Bonar Law, when he replied, had some kind words to say on Mr. MacDonald's return to the House. 'As I looked,' he said, 'at the face of the hon. gentleman the other day, though I do not think I have ever agreed with him in anything, I was not sorry to see him back in this House.' He then made a very kindly reference to the generous behaviour of Clynes on the occasion when he was superseded by MacDonald as Chairman of the Labour Parliamentary Party. 'It showed, in my opinion, the qualities which Englishmen -- no, I will not give Englishmen the credit, because it is men of our race who possess it above all others -- always display, and that is the sporting spirit.' His reply to the charge of disorderliness was that it was an old story, and that MacDonald was playing the part of Rip Van Winkle.

To the new Labour Members, this speech of MacDonald was regarded with some disappointment. They had hoped that the new leader would have been much more aggressive in his attack on their opponents. They had expected a fighting lead, abandoning the lines of convention. To those ardent spirits, it had seemed that MacDonald, instead of boldly unfurling the red flag of Socialism, had timidly hoisted a white flag. Thus early there were murmurings and mutterings behind the scenes. This was the first shock to the Party.

Another was to follow immediately. It has always been the custom on the first day of the parliamentary session to bring the proceedings to an end after the leaders of the various parties had delivered their speeches. Arrangements to this effect had been made 'through the usual channels' between the parties. This led to the first revolt. The new Labour Members had come to Westminster full of a stern determination to fight the battle of the poor. They were determined to break rules and conventions if they stood in the way of that high purpose. There was in these early days, particularly among the younger Members, an attitude of hostility towards

THE UNEMPLOYMENT QUESTION HAVING  
PRODUCED A CRISIS, MR MACDONALD FORMS A  
"NATIONAL GOVERNMENT."



PROPHECIES FOR 1931

OLD LOW'S ALMANACK-

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the other two parties. They, therefore, resented keenly the arrangement made with them. Here was an agreement made with their political enemies which would prevent discussion when the need was urgent and clamant. To show their disapproval of this attitude of compromise they decided to defy the Whips and keep the debate going. So for many hours there followed a series of the most remarkable maiden speeches ever heard in the House. As the speakers were mostly Scots, Mr. Bonar Law remained through the whole evening, and declared later that he had enjoyed every minute of it.

It was significant that the Tory leader remained, while the Labour leader was conspicuous by his absence.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1922 AND 1923

**T**he General Election of 1922 was fought by Mr. Bonar Law on a policy of Peace and Tranquillity. It resulted in a comfortable Conservative majority of 79 over all parties. The Conservatives had 347 seats ; Labour, 142 ; Independent Liberals, 64 ; National (Lloyd George) Liberals, 53 ; and miscellaneous (including 2 Irish Nationalists), 9.

The first part of the session of Parliament which began after the Election of 1922 was devoted mainly to formal and agreed questions, except for the stormy interlude by the storm-troops from the Clyde. In the early part of 1923, the issues were less formal. MacDonald, writing in the *Socialist Review*, June 1923, says :

‘ Whilst the work of the Labour Party in Parliament has steadily increased national confidence, whilst its contributions to solutions of foreign problems, finance, housing, industrial disputes have shown that it only needs opportunity and responsibility, other parties have become discredited with an equal steadiness, and they are not unaware of their position.’

Speaking of the Tory Government, he continues :

‘ It lives by a majority only and by no other authority. It is really a puny thing. Under normal circumstances, it would fall soon, and whilst it lasted, it would lose respect in the country. The circumstances are not normal, however. The Opposition benches are held by three parties. Labour conducts nine-tenths of the work of the Opposition and, for House of Commons purposes, is recognized as the Opposition. Upon the confidence which it gains is to depend the future of British politics.’

The article then proceeds to give expression to MacDonald’s

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great fear, the fear that had become an obsession with him, that the Labour Party would lose reputation and good name by being extreme in policy or behaviour. He had long recognized and appreciated the proneness to panic of the people, and feared that the Labour Opposition might become the victims of a Bolshevik scare.

‘The weakness,’ he wrote, ‘of the Labour Party lies in the fact that it is a “Red Terror” to the minds of large masses of people who know little about it, but who read a profusion of descriptions of it and an equal profusion of absurd criticisms of its immediate projects, like the Capital Levy and Socialism by an Act of Parliament.’

He was genuinely anxious to soothe the minds of his political opponents and urged the Labour Members to realize the necessity of adopting a more restrained and orderly Parliamentary deportment. He was intensely irritated by any departure from dignity and senatorial correctitude on the part of the younger and wilder elements of his supporters.

‘The Labour Party,’ he says, ‘has not yet sufficiently learned, perhaps, what is the most effective Parliamentary demeanour, and, in its spirit of deadly earnestness, it may sometimes forget that a poor argument or a rude remark is not worth noticing, and that, whilst demonstrative enthusiasm may be understood by those who know all the circumstances, it tends to antagonize people who read of it in the papers next morning.’

The Premiership of Mr. Bonar Law was short-lived. There is no doubt that his absence from the Leadership of the House of Commons was to some extent the cause of the weakness and inactivity of the Government. In April 1923 Bonar Law was a dying man, and the question of his successor was eagerly canvassed. There were many eager aspirants for the post. As far as the Tory hierarchy was concerned, there was no other candidate possible than Baldwin. Indeed, the choice of Baldwin, which should have caused amazement, had a sense of inevitability about it. His selection was not because he was the only person who possessed the ability, popularity, and experience. Sir Sidney Lee has pointed out that almost every



British Premier since Pitt and Addington has been a veteran of the political stage whose name, features, and record have been familiar to the public for many years. Outside the Conservative Party, Baldwin was little known. He would have passed down Throgmorton Street without a head being turned to see him. Why then inevitable? Because, although he was not of the Prime Minister class, he represented the remainder after the obvious candidates had been eliminated from the calculation.

MacDonald says of the position at this time :

‘ Mr. Bonar Law has resigned, and Mr. Baldwin reigns in his stead. Mr. Bonar Law’s Premiership was that of a sick and a sad man who roused the feelings not of a political leader, but of a fated human being. Mr. Baldwin is a robust leader, who will have to fight with political weapons. He takes over the old Government with hardly a change, except that Lord Robert Cecil joins it, much to the surprise of his friends, and Mr. McKenna follows suit much to the consternation of his. There will obviously be no change of policy. Lord Curzon remains at the Foreign Office ; Mr. Bridgeman at the Home Office ; Sir Douglas Hogg continues to be chief legal adviser. The Labour Party could not wish for a better arrangement. The Government stands for reaction in mind, interest, and constitutionalism.’

To that criticism MacDonald added a defence of gradualism in a statement of his basic biological theory, written in that political-scientific jargon in which he is so fond of indulging.

‘ The strength of the Labour Party is that it has large conceptions of political aims and purposes. It relates life to political action ; it has ideals which it embodies in Parliamentary policy ; it thinks of the whole community and subordinates interests and functions to the common well-being ; it regards society as a unity. It is a living Party, and its influence upon institutions is to transform them into instruments of the distinctive ideas and aspirations of these times. We live in a creative age, and the Labour Party holds in its principles and outlook the sources and the channels of the creative impulse.’

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The 'Peace and Tranquillity' policy of Mr. Bonar Law having so far succeeded, it was assumed that there would be no disturbance of the political weather for some years. Everything looked so stable. There seemed no need for making a change. No precedent exists for what Mr. Stanley Baldwin did at this time, but no one who knows him will fail to see how characteristic the action was of the man. Never before has a Prime Minister with such a majority, a united party, a strong organization and great personal popularity, thrown everything in the wild gamble of a General Election. Yet this is what Mr. Stanley Baldwin did in 1923. Why did he do it? He did it because in certain respects his character is unique. Again and again in the course of his political career, he has taken a course in which success could not possibly have been foreseen and risked all on a question of principle. More than once when the violent reactionaries who form so large a section of his Party have been hounding him on to a certain action, he has stood firm and, challenging every consequence, has followed the dictates of his conscience.

This was one such instance. Although his colleagues would have counselled his taking advantage of the 'peace and tranquillity' programme, he would have none of it. He was genuinely distressed with the great mass of unemployment. He watched the black line creeping up the chart with anxiety and misgiving. When he made up his mind that a change of policy was necessary, he took the line that all his friends advised him to abandon. He had come definitely to the conclusion that Protection was the only remedy which would help unemployment. In the 1922 election, Mr. Bonar Law had given a pledge that, except for small limited measures of safeguarding, there would be no Protection in the coming Parliament. Mr. Baldwin, feeling himself hampered by this pledge, went to the King and asked for a dissolution.

Mr. Baldwin had not been defeated in Parliament; he had a majority; and the Government had not yet been a year in office. The King was, therefore, advised that Mr. Baldwin's request was without precedent and unconstitutional, and refused to grant it. Mr. Baldwin was, however, determined that he must have a mandate for Protection, in order to survive a winter of unemployment. He put before His Majesty,

it is said, 'a resolution of the whole Cabinet supporting the appeal of the Prime Minister.' His request was then granted.

On 13 November 1923 he stood up in the House of Commons and, to the surprise of a crowded and excited audience, declared that Parliament would be dissolved forthwith, because he 'could not attempt to steer the country through the winter of 1924 without an instrument that was not permissible under the Bonar Law pledge.' As the issue, as far as the Conservatives and Liberals were concerned, was Free Trade or Protection, the two dissentient wings of the Liberal Party joined, and a joint manifesto was issued by them with the signature of Mr. Lloyd George below that of Mr. Asquith.

To fight two General Elections in twelve months would tax the financial resources of the wealthiest party. The Labour Party is a very poor party financially. It is the only political party that publishes a full list of subscriptions and donations to its political fund. It has never had the large resources which the other parties derive from the sale of titles and honours. The subscription of the average Conservative to the Party Fund is an insurance premium against the risk of economic change. The present system has given him his position and privileges ; naturally, he is no hurry to alter it. The contribution of the Socialist to his Party is a freewill offering to help to achieve the very political and economic changes which the Conservative is using every effort to prevent. Broadly speaking, the Conservative depends on the donations of the wealthy ; the Labour Party on the pence of the poor. There is no doubt that the Conservative Headquarters were 'banking' on the poverty of the Labour Party to handicap it heavily in the costly struggle.

MacDonald threw himself into the election campaign with energy and enthusiasm. He realized that great issues were at stake. He made a speech at Bristol. He claims to have made his first public speech at Bristol, but he has given several other towns that distinction. He had a tumultuous welcome there. His peroration, with its picturesque metaphor, was particularly effective. He recalled his former visit.

'This is 1923, and I stand here with this wonderful, moving crowd in front of me. In 1885, I stood in a public place in Bristol, and three people came to listen. Ah !

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who will say that there is not something like the finger of Providence in all this. And how little the other side understand us : how little ! How small is the vision that they direct upon us ! We, the expression of a great uprising of the human spirit, never old, never satisfied, never finding a permanent habitation in any of the stable habitations that men build, but always like the Bedouin, sleeping in tents that he folds up in the morning in order to go on his pilgrimage. But, my friends, I see no end of the journey. We have come, we shall journey, and we shall go, and our children coming after us will go on with their journey, and their children will go on with theirs. And, my friends, what you and I have to take care is that the journey is both onward and upward.'

In this election, 427 Labour candidates went to the poll on 6 December 1923, and 191 were successful. The total Labour vote went up to 4,347,379. MacDonald was returned again for Aberavon—this time with a majority of 4000. The Liberals did not put up a candidate against him ; he had a straight fight with a Conservative.

Although MacDonald led a Party which was now nearly one-third of the House of Commons and was, indeed, the second Party in the House in point of size, the result of the election was a deadlock, as will be seen from the following figures :

	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Members</i>
Conservatives . . .	5,359,690	258
Labour . . .	4,347,379	191
Liberals . . .	4,251,573	158
Others . . .	226,796	8
		<hr/> 615

None of the three parties had a majority. The rejection of Socialism by the electors was much more emphatic than that of Protection. In the House of Commons, there were 191 Labour Members against 424 of the other parties. Thus a Labour Government would be powerless to pass any measure, unless it could persuade a considerable number of its 424

opponents to vote with it. This meant coalition, either temporarily, as individual Bills were brought forward, or as a pact for the duration of the Parliament. Labour, therefore, unable to join with the Conservatives, was thus at the mercy of the Liberals. Mr. Asquith was the deciding factor. But he, too, was in a dilemma. He had to estimate the balance of advantage. There were three possible alternatives. He could support either Labour or Conservative, or make a bid for office himself, relying on Conservative support.

In the panic fear that was stirred up when the result of the election was known, several influential newspapers besought Asquith to take office and save the country from revolution. The *Daily Mail* alarmed at the thought that the reversion of the office of Prime Minister should go to a Socialist, denounced MacDonald as one who would undermine the Constitution. It went further; it appealed to the King to ignore Constitutional practice by sending for Mr. Asquith, instead of Mr. MacDonald; and Mr. Baldwin was implored to bring his Party to the support of a Liberal-Conservative coalition.

The sudden chance of forming a Government came as a surprise to the Labour Party and caught it unprepared. Few members of the Party can have hoped that Labour would be offered the reins of Government for years to come. True they had dreamed of a Socialist Government some day, but it was an ideal to be realized in the distant future. Not so MacDonald. To him a Labour Government had been just round the corner. He must have seen it as imminent, and, as there was then no rival for the throne, have visualized himself as Prime Minister. Again and again at the meetings of the Parliamentary Labour Party, he would allude to the time when Labour would be the Government of the day. It was a reward for faithful service, and he would add an admonition to the trouble-makers that they should so comport themselves that their walk and conversation would be in keeping with their high destiny.

Shrewd observers in other parties agreed with MacDonald in the imminence of a Labour Government and did their utmost to prevent or delay it. One of the arguments used by Mr. Bonar Law at Glasgow just before the 1922 election

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in advocating the break-up of the Coalition Government was that, while such a coalition was necessary when, during the War, a great national effort was being made, and unity in a common cause was essential, now that the War was over and domestic questions came once more to be discussed, it were better to revert to the traditional Party divisions. The reason he gave was significant. It was that the two-party system made Labour inevitably the alternative government. The risk of its becoming the Government of the country, he thought, must be avoided at all costs, and the only way to prevent it was to dissolve the Coalition Government and return to three parties. Bonar Law's fears were realized one year later, much to the dismay and alarm of his Party.

The Socialists have always declared that there were really only two Parties—the Socialist and the Capitalist—and their policy has been to drive Liberals and Tories into one Party. That Bonar Law saw the danger of making Labour the alternative Government is a tribute to his foresight and shrewdness.

One important fact did not escape MacDonald. He realized perfectly that those 4,347,379 electors who voted for Labour in 1923 were not all Socialists. A great many of those votes were cast in constituencies where there was no Liberal candidate, and many Liberals voted for the Labour candidate, however much they might object to his Socialism. They had to weigh their fear of Protection against their fear of Socialism. Even in three-cornered contests, where a regular Liberal candidate was standing against a Conservative and a Socialist, the zealous Free Trade Liberal might cast his vote for the Labour man if he thought that the Liberal was not strong enough to keep out the Protectionist Conservative. Then there were other issues, notably Peace and Temperance, which might account for some of the votes given to Labour nominees. The effect of all this was to confirm MacDonald in a policy more reformist and Liberal than drastic and revolutionary.

Although the General Election had gone against him, Mr. Baldwin decided to remain in office and await defeat in the House of Commons. He presented a King's Speech that was like the last will and testament of an optimist who had died bankrupt. A vote of no confidence was moved on 17 January

1924. The trial of the Baldwin Government lasted through three days of keen debate. Labour and Liberals joined forces, and the Conservative Ministry was condemned by 328 votes to 256, a decisive majority of 72. On the following day, Mr. Baldwin announced the resignation of the Government.

The King had been advised that constitutional practice demanded that the leader of the next largest party be asked to form a Government. This meant the offer of the Premiership to MacDonald. The summons of the King to MacDonald to present himself at Buckingham Palace was a landmark in British history. The Premiership was the greatest gift in the power of the King to offer and the highest and most coveted honour to which any citizen could aspire. It was not because MacDonald was of working-class origin that the offer was unique. Many poor men had risen to positions of eminence in this and other lands. The poor-man-famous has become almost a commonplace during the last decade. Mr. Lloyd George, a poor man's son, who rose to be, at one time, the greatest figure in Europe, is an example. What made MacDonald's case distinctive was the fact that he, a declared Socialist, should have been offered the highest office in a Monarchical State. He was selected as representing the Labour Party, and that Party had been pledged by conference after conference to revolutionary change. A Socialist Commonwealth was its declared objective.

One clear indication that the event was unexpected was the fact that there was no provision made for it by the Labour Party. Remarkable, and with far-reaching consequences, was the fact that MacDonald went to Buckingham Palace at the summons of the King with an absolutely free hand. No commitments of Labour Party Conferences bound him in any way. Since the founding of the Labour Party in 1900, the question of the Monarchy had never been discussed. Although on almost every other subject the policy of the Party had been discussed, the question of Republicanism had never been raised. This omission was probably due to the theory that this was one of those questions which, like religion, should be avoided, lest its discussion might reveal differences of opinion in the Party. In this country, the Monarchical system is

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extremely popular ; it compares favourably with Presidencies in many other countries. Moreover, the question did not arise in any urgency in those days.

Although not specifically embodied in articles in their creed, the Socialist attitude may be fairly summarized as follows : They regard Monarchy based, as it is, on the hereditary principle as an anachronism. To them it is a romantic and picturesque survival of the pre-democratic age. Having regard to the fact that the number of monarchs in Europe has decreased in recent years from eighteen to ten, they believe that the ultimate substitution of a Co-operative Commonwealth for the Monarchical State is inevitable.

Not only was MacDonald not committed by his position as leader to any course of action, but he was himself definitely opposed to any immediate drastic change, political, economic or constitutional.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *TAKING OFFICE, 1924*

What was the position of the Labour Party, and what was the view of MacDonald? Should he accept office under the conditions of minority revealed by the election? There was some difference of opinion. The essence of democracy is rule by the majority, and the majority had declared against Labour. Socialist speakers are in the habit of referring to Liberals and Conservative as being really in one party. At least, it can truly be said that they both support and defend a capitalist order of society, to the overthrow of which the Labour Party, year after year in conference assembled, has definitely pledged itself. For such an overthrow this General Election had given no mandate. The aggregate vote for the continuance of capitalism had been overwhelming.

Mrs. Mary Agnes Hamilton, the well-known novelist and ex-Member of Parliament, who was in the inner circle of the Labour Party at the time, has told of an incident that throws a strong light on MacDonald's view as to Labour taking office. As he was the only possible Labour Prime Minister at the time, his view could hardly be called impartial.

'On the Monday that followed Thursday's declaration of the poll,' she writes, 'an informal luncheon took place, at which there were present a fairly representative collection of those who claim to express the mind of the Party. Before MacDonald arrived, opinions were mainly against taking on. Now, it appeared, was the chance to form a Tory-Liberal combination against Labour, which would enable the issue for the future to be quite clear—Socialism *versus* anti-Socialism—an ideal position for the propagandist. Our strength on the platform had been that we could always attack, need never defend. Were we to go in, we should expose a long front to criticism; we could no longer point to the failures of others and say how much better we could do. The only argument for taking on that anyone produced

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was for a purely spectacular action—a King's speech, comprising a Socialist declaration, on which we should at once go out. This was hailed with approbation. There was eloquence, enthusiasm, conviction. Mr. MacDonald appeared. For a few moments he listened. Then he proceeded to riddle this case with such effect that its exponents had, almost while he was speaking, crossed over, most of them with the belief that they had, in fact, been there all the time. To stay out for the sake of a strong platform position was mere cowardice ; to go in for the sake of coming out, worse—a fatuous gesture. To run up a flag in order that it should be shot away, with the knowledge in our own minds and in those of our opponents that it was to be shot away, was the emptiest form of play-acting. Were our responsibilities confined to words ? Were there not things to be done that needed doing, and that we knew how to do ? Everything hinged upon a European settlement ; was it not a primary duty to try to secure it ? Moreover, apart from that, would we kindly consider what was to happen to the Party if it refused. It would lose even the Opposition.'

That these particular reasons should have converted the company was a tribute not so much to the weight or validity of the argument as to the forceful personality of the advocate. Every point might well have been challenged. For there would be no strong platform position if the Labour Party had refused the King's offer to take office. It would be very difficult to explain to the average audience why His Majesty's gracious offer had been refused. The average elector, not being a Socialist, would regard such an invitation as a great honour and would not understand and appreciate such a refusal. On the larger issue, the Socialist would not regard refusal as cowardice, but acceptance as surrender. 'To run up a flag in order that it should be shot away would be the emptiest form of play-acting,' says MacDonald. Here the metaphor has got out of hand. Flags are hoisted to declare to what side the combatant belongs. To hoist no flag is cowardice ; to hoist an enemy's flag is treachery. Moreover, the alleged 'call from the people' for Labour to form a Government was somewhat equivocal when four of the electors were saying 'Come,' while ten were emphatically saying 'Go.'

## TAKING OFFICE, 1924

Meanwhile, there were these, and they not the least important members of the Labour Party, who advised MacDonald to accept office. Mr. Sidney Webb, now Lord Passfield, held that the first duty of an Opposition was to be always ready to form an alternative Ministry. Otherwise he thought coalition was inevitable, and to that he was opposed. He held the view that the Labour Party should face its own responsibility as 'the alternative Government' alone without seeking the aid of any other party. The advice of Mr. Clifford Allen, now Lord Allen of Hurtwood, to MacDonald on this question is interesting in view of their subsequent relationship. He had been a conscientious objector during the War, had been chairman of the I.L.P., and was a rather ethereal, sentimental 'up-lift' Socialist. He had always sought MacDonald's friendship. MacDonald offered him a peerage for services rendered during the crisis, and he amazed his former friends by taking it. He, too, was all for taking office and discussing the question as to how in the circumstances Labour might use power.

'We could not,' he declared, 'accept office on any kind of arranged sufferance. Since we should be a Minority Government, in no circumstances must we pretend that we were forming a normal Government with the intention of carrying on for a long, undefined period of time until chance and misfortune discredited us, as it does most Governments possessed even of a full majority. We must only take office with a definite and publicly declared design—namely, that we will form a purely temporary and emergency Government for a few months to deal with two or three selected urgent questions such as Unemployment and the European chaos. The War Debt could be submitted to a Commission. We should state that, when these subjects had been dealt with during the first few months, we should bring before Parliament further important Socialist measures, and appeal to the country upon them, if defeated.'

Mr. H. N. Brailsford was at the time editor of the *New Leader*, the official organ of the Independent Labour Party. He is one of the most informed and brilliant political writers of the day. In an article, he strongly urged Mr. MacDonald to take office, although that would entail some sort of working

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arrangement with Mr. Asquith. Such an arrangement would be difficult, but Mr. Brailsford thought it unavoidable. The article was really a brief but brilliant and searching analysis of the trials and tribulations of minority government, of which MacDonald was to have sad experience on two occasions.

‘A calm decision of this issue,’ he wrote, ‘must turn on an examination of the conditions under which we should have to work. Of the ordinary handicaps we need say nothing—the hostility of the City, the venom of the Press, the scepticism of the Civil Service. These we should have to face, even with a great majority. But how far can we go if, at any moment, the vote of Liberals and Tories may upset us? It is idle to invent fairy-tale programmes. We cannot legislate by decree. Time must be consumed on Estimates and on the wearisome detail of Committee work. A minority cannot make a dictatorial use of the closure. For any wide and comprehensive programme, it will not suffice that Liberals should refrain from Votes of No Confidence. We must be able to reckon on a measure of goodwill. It is easy to say that we contemplate no arrangements. Face to face with Liberals, side by side with them, our Party would have to realize that they too have their point of view, their interests that must be considered. We shall be every hour at their mercy; they will either collaborate or wreck. The possibilities of wrecking are subtle and various. It would not disconcert us if Liberals and Tories combined to defeat some humane provision for the Unemployed, the aged, or the children; we could go to the country on that. But suppose that, while we were painfully balancing our Budget, they rushed in with a motion to abolish the sugar tax? Everything turns on the length of our term of office and the extent of our programme. To talk of ignoring the Liberals and refusing any understanding with them seems to me difficult, if we are contemplating as much as six or eight months of office. If we are going to walk down this long road, we should have to carry them with us, halting, limping, and breathless perhaps, but not jostling or tripping. With any weighty programme on our backs, we should soon find ourselves consciously drafting our Bills with the fear of Mr. Asquith before our eyes. Would he object to this or jib at that? Then out it must go.’

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE*

The attendance of the Labour Leader at Buckingham Palace was an event of national importance, an incident of historical interest. He was received in audience by the King alone. MacDonald had not met King George before and has told of the impression made upon him by that memorable first interview. To the King, too, the meeting was of great interest as the beginning of a new era. In the long line of his dynasty, no reigning monarch had received in friendly consultation a subject professing policies and opinions so opposed to, and, indeed, subversive of, the whole system of which he was the symbol. As MacDonald was personally unknown to him, the impression the King had formed of him had been built up from the Press and from his own advisers. As neither source was friendly either to MacDonald or to the Labour Party, it may readily be inferred that the King looked forward to his interview with the Leader of that Party with some misgiving.

MacDonald has described how overwhelmed he was by the King's gracious attitude. The King had already known several Labour leaders. Indeed, Mr. Arthur Henderson, Mr. Clynes, and others had held office. These had belonged to the Trade Union section of the Labour Party, had been artisans, manual workers. MacDonald was different. He was better educated, had travelled more widely, and belonged to the section of black-coated workers which form the lower middle class. There was one other difference that marked MacDonald out from these leaders. While Henderson and Clynes were proud of their association with the working class, MacDonald was rather ashamed of it. He was keenly anxious that he should not be regarded as a mere working man and sought to forget his humble origin and plebeian affiliations.

The uniqueness of this interview made it embarrassing for

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both. His one object was to remove from the mind of the King the natural anxiety with which he regarded the advent of a Labour Government. He had to assure the King that he appreciated the great responsibility which was about to be placed upon him. A born courtier, with that deference which he had inherited from his Highland ancestry, he sought to ingratiate himself with the King. His first words answered the question as to what change the new situation would involve. The King was assured that the coming of a Labour Government would not make any change whatever. There need be no misgiving as to his personal loyalty to the Throne or as to his determination to maintain the high tradition of the Premiership. This attitude of MacDonald relieved the King's anxiety. The absorption of a score of Labour leaders into society did not mean the same as the elevation of a class and did not call for the breaking down of all the barriers of social prestige. As it turned out, few of MacDonald's colleagues shared his social ambition. Some break in the social caste was inevitable, but MacDonald's attitude made the change small and easy. It was a great relief to the King to find that his new Prime Minister would maintain to the full the traditional routine of Court dress and ritual.

The position of the King, the institution of the Court, the patronage, the influence, were to remain as if the change of Government had been from one of the old parties to the other. There is no doubt, however, that, in the exceptional circumstances, a change would have been difficult to resist, had MacDonald demanded it. The King would have been willing to make some concession of the traditional routine, some modification of the official ceremonial to meet the exigencies of a situation for which there were no precedents. But MacDonald made no request of that kind. To do so would have gone far to destroy the impression that he wished the King to form. Although his acceptance of high office was an innovation in form, he had to convince the King that it would not be so in fact. He was just a Prime Minister like the others and would follow the tradition of Pitt and Palmerston, Disraeli and Gladstone. He doubtless assured His Majesty that he was no wild extremist and that he would prove his loyalty and fidelity by his conduct. He could readily give a pledge that his

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Government would attempt no hare-brained adventures, no wild-cat schemes, while he remained in office.

In describing his first interview with the King, MacDonald has told that His Majesty was greatly concerned on one point, which he regarded as of some importance. Although he might well have misgivings as to the political tenets of his new Ministers, it was not that that troubled him. It was whether the Labour Ministers would wear Court dress. There was one Member of the Labour Party whose advent to Cabinet rank the King regarded with some concern, as he was considered the most extreme of the Ministers. Wheatley was the leader of those Socialists from the Clyde whose coming to Westminster had caused so much misgiving. Would he conform to the etiquette of the Court and wear the appropriate dress? This, says MacDonald, filled the mind of the King to the exclusion of all else. He reassured His Majesty that Wheatley would assent to all that was essential in the circumstances.

In this connection, it is interesting to recall Wheatley's own story of his first interview with the King. He was a level-headed, strong-minded man and the last person to be excited or afraid; yet he looked forward to his meeting with the King with a nervous apprehension. He was agreeably surprised at the kindly reception that he received. He was astonished, too, at the intimate knowledge that the King showed of the general economic and political situation. In course of conversation, the King asked Wheatley why he was a revolutionary. Then Wheatley told King George the story of his life. He had been born and brought up in conditions of the most sordid poverty. He was one of eleven persons who lived, not merely for a month, but for years in a single-roomed house in Lanarkshire. In this overcrowded slum, Wheatley lived with his parents till he was twenty-four years of age. When he was twelve, he was taken from school and sent to work in the coal mines. The King listened with a friendly sympathy to the terrible story. He was surprised and shocked. 'Is it possible,' he said, 'that my people live in such awful conditions?' Then, as he was bidding the Socialist Minister good-bye, he said: 'I tell you, Mr. Wheatley, that, if I had to live in conditions like that, I would be a revolutionary myself.'

Although MacDonald had always known that dress

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pageantry, formality, and routine comprised almost all the public duty that remained to the King, he was astonished at the extraordinary stress laid upon them. This emphasis of the ritual of the Court was a development of constitutional practice to meet changing conditions. The continuous withdrawal of the direct, executive functions of administration from the King to the Government of the day left him only the decorative, social, and ceremonial side. The word 'figurehead' has been used to characterize the position of the head of a constitutional Monarchy as it exists to-day in Great Britain. It is true that the Monarchy adds a fine old-world ornament to the ship of State and has in theory no power to send it forth or control its course. In practice, however, the personal influence of the King remains a potent factor.

During the later years of the life of Queen Victoria, the pageantry of the Court had been somewhat restrained. Lord Ponsonby, who was a Page of Honour at the Court of Queen Victoria, has said that 'King Edward revived ceremonial because he loved it. To-day the almost unparalleled advertisement of Royalty and the flocking of crowds to witness their movements seems to arise from concerted policy.'

MacDonald realized the significance that this pageantry and ceremonial display had with the King and determined at once to play up to it. He saw that his popularity with the King would be greatly enhanced if he associated himself with his wishes in this respect. To the King this was a test question. The attitude of MacDonald meant the acceptance of class, caste, and social distinctions. It was the only question on which the King had anticipated any difficulty. Violent political change was impossible; Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Asquith would see to that, but these estimable gentlemen could not safeguard the dress and routine of the Court, which was in reality the symbol of sovereignty. There was no need to worry. MacDonald had realized that, if he wished to be regarded as one of the aristocracy, he must wear the livery. It was the mark of his initiation and also to many the sign of his renunciation.

There was another side to MacDonald's appearing in Court dress, apart from his desire to please the King. That is that he liked it. It was easy for him to defend the wearing of these ceremonial fal-de-rals, as he had always been very vain of his



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personal appearance. The wearing of Court dress was one of the most revealing incidents in MacDonald's life and one which gave rise to many protests among the rank and file of the Party. Such was his power and authority that he was able to enforce his wishes upon the other members of the Government. Had the Party been consulted, the verdict against wearing these ostentatious fripperies would have been overwhelming. But the Party was never consulted.

When, one morning, a picture of Ramsay MacDonald in full gold-braided Court dress and complete with sword appeared, there was an immediate outcry from the Labour Party. It caused a first-class crisis in the Party. It was regarded as a desertion of the working class for the Capitalist enemy, of which this ostentatious finery was the insignia. It seemed objectionable, this emphasizing of differentiation, this social change following political change. Questions began to be asked. Was it for this that MacDonald was chosen leader? How would this bring Socialism, help unemployment or raise the standard of life of the working classes? For these objects they had supported MacDonald; would this donning the livery of their enemies bring them nearer? Of course, this protest came chiefly from MacDonald's Socialist followers. Many people hailed it with delight. To be asked to Court was a great honour to a poor man. Many ladies were concerned about Miss MacDonald. Would she know how to behave at Court? Would she wear the right dress for the great occasion? Some Society ladies offered to help her. These she calmly snubbed. 'I have already chosen my frocks,' she said, 'and I think I know how to behave at Court.'

Not only was MacDonald's decision to wear Court dress regarded as a surrender; it was deemed to be absolutely unnecessary. It was an opinion widely held that MacDonald could have avoided it, if he had explained all the circumstances to the King, who could not be expected to know the mind of the Labour Party on these matters. While some compromise might be necessary or expedient in the circumstances, there were still matters where a Labour Prime Minister would feel himself compelled to take a different line from that of his Liberal and Tory predecessors. Although the Labour Party were definitely opposed to the House of Lords, hereditary titles,

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etc., a Labour Prime Minister without a majority in the House of Commons could not make radical changes in the Constitution. On the other hand, they were a working-class Party, and, accordingly, certain modifications should be made. If it were necessary for Labour Ministers to confer with the King, why should not some concession be made, as indeed the Speaker had already done with regard to the Speaker's Levee? Moreover, the plain attire in which the representative of the United States appeared at these great royal functions would have served as a precedent.

As it was, the Cabinet of the first Labour Government in Great Britain went to the Palace of the King arrayed in the conventional attire, and when, next morning, the British public saw, in their newspapers, their new rulers in the decorous dignity, they thanked God over their bacon and eggs for another bloodless revolution !

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *THE FIRST LABOUR CABINET*

**T**he coming of a Labour Government in 1924 was a landmark on the road to democracy. It marked a continuous progress, which followed in due course the extension of the franchise to the working classes. As the landed gentry had to witness the rise of the business man, not only to the franchise, but to power and authority in the State, so they both had to admit the working classes, in course of time, to a share in the government of the country. This rise of democracy, the increasing participation of the people in the government of the country directly and indirectly, is one of the most remarkable phenomena of our history.

There was a time when the traditional Member of Parliament belonged almost exclusively to the upper classes. The statesmen who ruled this country were exclusively drawn from the great public schools. Eton, Harrow, and other well-known schools boast of the long line of famous statesmen, Pro-consuls, and Governors of Colonies, whose names are enshrined on their rolls of honour. Many a noble lord figures there, but never an artisan, and to have suggested that a man of working-class origins should one day be Prime Minister would have then been regarded as an outrage.

In the election of 1920 Mr. Winston Churchill made a remark that has often been quoted since: 'Labour is not fit to govern.' The answer to that was the 1924 Labour Government, which, although it had such a short and critical career, yet showed that it could carry on the affairs of State with as much skill and competence as any of the patrician Administrations of other days. Lord Birkenhead, too, jeered at the Labour Government. He used the jibe that cut deepest when he said that the Labour Members slept three in a bed. MacDonald retorted by saying that Birkenhead's appointment to

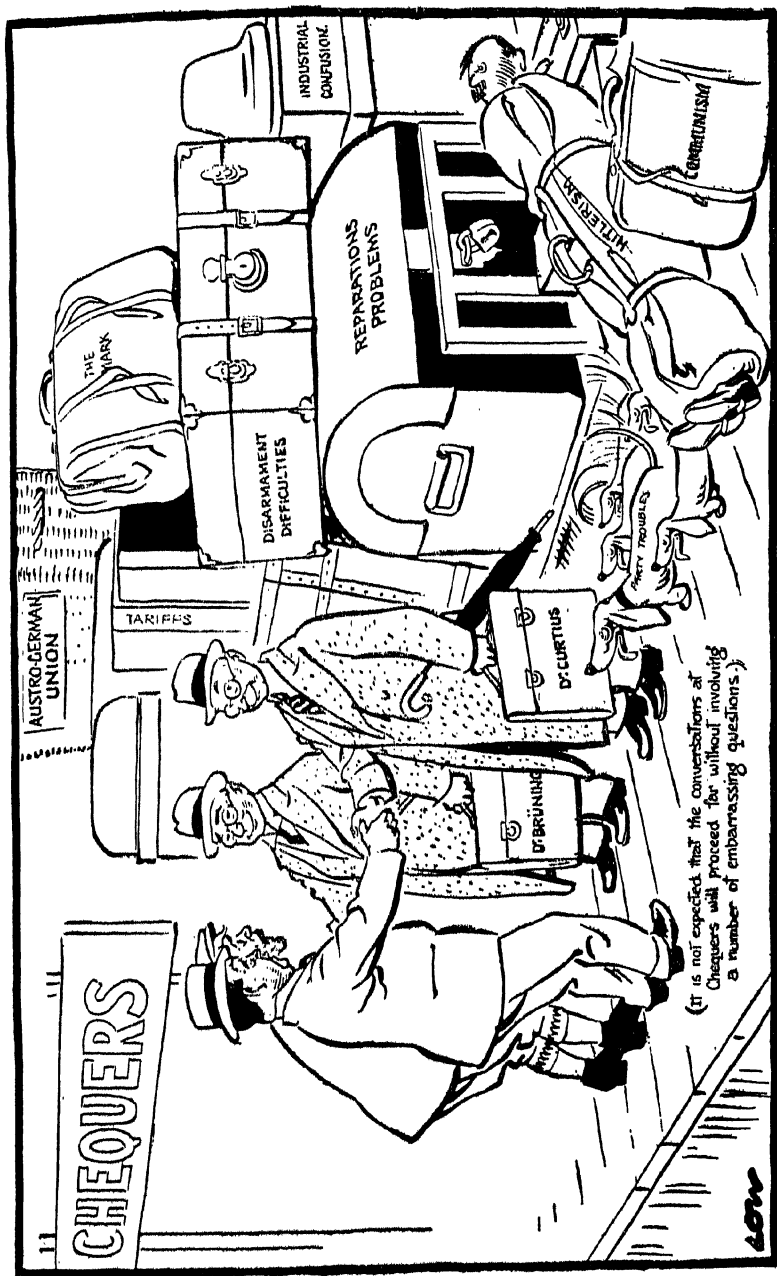
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the greatest historical office of Lord Chancellorship showed that whoever filled it need not necessarily be a great or a dignified lawyer, a wise or very upright politician, a sensible man or a law-abiding citizen.

Ever since MacDonald saw that the result of the election would give Labour a chance of office, he had been studying the situation and laying his plans. Without consulting a single colleague, he decided to accept office as Premier if he were given the chance. Whilst the Party were considering the vital question whether or not Labour should accept office as a minority Government, MacDonald was choosing his Cabinet. Immediately after he had accepted office, he went off to Lossiemouth to think things out in peace and quiet by the sea. The only person he took with him was Brigadier-General C. B. Thomson. The role of General Thomson was, however, more that of a hiking companion and golfing partner than a consultant adviser.

The task of choosing a Cabinet was both difficult and delicate. When the list of the Members of the first Labour Administration is studied, the considerations that determined the choice of the particular individuals become apparent. MacDonald's hopes and fears, likes and dislikes, confidences and suspicions, tactics and strategies are all evident in the strange assembly that gathered round the table at No. 10 in 1924. One was obviously chosen because of the strong Trade Union influence he had behind him ; another, because of his position in the Party ; another, because of the support he would give to MacDonald ; another, because he was the least dangerous of the Left ; and yet another, because he was the most notable of the Right.

Mr. John Wheatley was a man apart. He was the leader of the Scottish Socialists. He was a man of brilliant parts, splendid courage, downright, uncompromising sincerity and unflinching honesty. He definitely belonged to the Left Wing and, since his arrival at Westminster, had led the extreme section of the Party. Indeed, he had several times been at variance with the Speaker, had been in several disorderly scenes, and on one memorable occasion had been actually suspended. Yet within a year of his sensational suspension, he was kissing hands at Buckingham Palace as a member of



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the British Government, the Privy Council, and the Cabinet. Why? The reason is plain. MacDonald recognized the dominant part played by the Scots members of the Labour Party. They had been instrumental in making him Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party. They were a powerful band, which at that time acted together and might be relied on to have their way. MacDonald was anxious to have them on his side, and by singling out their greatest member he would conciliate them and gain their support. Had it not been for this, not Wheatley's excellent qualities, his long experience in municipal politics in Glasgow or his powerful personality would have sufficed to induce MacDonald to appoint him Minister of Health.

The presence of one or two Ministers in MacDonald's first Government can only be accounted for on the ground that they were plainly hostages. It may well be that Lord Chelmsford was such a Minister. Various reasons are given for the appointment of a Tory and, moreover, one who had not exhibited any strong sympathy with Labour, to be First Lord of the Admiralty. This post is a key one. In the eyes of the Conservative Party, it took rank just after that of Premier and Chancellor of the Exchequer. That so important a post, nothing less than the control of the King's Navy, should pass into the hands of a mere commoner and a Socialist at that would have been intolerable. A Socialist might be Minister of Health or Minister of Labour, but not head of the Senior Service. It was too big a risk to take when the Government was obviously on trial. Lord Chelmsford was a real aristocrat of the traditional type; MacDonald was genuinely proud of being associated with him. It may be that the self-denying ordinance under which Lord Chelmsford took office was as a safeguard against revolution. That fear was greatly exaggerated. MacDonald could readily have assured him that his Toryism would not be shocked by any undignified act of the Labour Government, on which he had temporarily bestowed his patronage.

The first Labour Cabinet is unique in that, with the exception of the First Lord of the Admiralty, no one became a member of it from reasons of birth, wealth, or social position, but came by the way of capacity, administrative experience,

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and public service. The position of Lord Advocate in Scotland was also anomalous. Here, too, MacDonald appointed a Tory. There were several members of his own Party who had every qualification for this post, had not MacDonald been such a stickler for legal and constitutional etiquette. At meetings of the Parliamentary Labour Party, MacDonald had on several occasions to reply to protests against these appointments.

On the whole, the personnel of the first Labour Cabinet, for which MacDonald took entire responsibility, was very reassuring to those who had viewed the advent of Labour to office with alarm.

There was considerable surprise when it was announced that MacDonald had decided to take over the Foreign Secretaryship in addition to the Premiership. In a speech at the Labour Party Conference, at the end of his tenure of office, he gave his reason for this step.

‘When we took office, I determined to take upon my own back a double burden, not that I was unmindful of the weakness of human flesh or ignorant of the weight and the worry I was taking upon myself, but I was convinced that, if our country was to pull its full weight, the authority of the Premiership would have to be cast into the same scale as that of the Foreign Secretaryship. So I made my will and took up my burdens. The circumstances which called for this were exceptional ; national interests asked for it, and we responded.’

MacDonald’s chief aim in taking over the Secretaryship of Foreign Affairs doubtless was that he might put into practice in all that important sphere the principles and policy of the Labour Party.

‘My first task,’ he declared, ‘was to create a healthier atmosphere. I had to make a gesture and wait to see if it was responded to. It is these psychological things that are far more important than beastly clever dispatches, however politely handed by Ambassadors to Ministers, which are, nevertheless, thrown like bricks at their head. Our diplomacy must be perfectly straight and absolutely frank.’

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His hope then was to change the policy of the Foreign Office and revolutionize its method. He had made a study of Foreign Office administration, and had condemned it as one of the few remaining bulwarks of Conservative tradition and the last place to be democratized.

In his book, *A Policy for the Labour Party*, MacDonald points out that :

‘When Civil Service appointments were thrown open to public competition, the Foreign Office was reserved to patronage ; when our State opened its administrative doors to brains wherever they were to be found, the Foreign Office remained barred to all except those whose parents could give them a subsidy of £400 a year. The plausible but pernicious theory of the “ continuity of Foreign Policy ” was artfully preached, nominally as a condition of national security, but really as a means of continuing bureaucratic and class predominance in our foreign relationships and of maintaining appointments and promotions by intrigue (largely controlled by certain clerical influences) in a way which is no secret to those familiar with Whitehall life. At point after point, the religious ceremony of taboo has been performed in the interests of the Foreign Office. The inevitable results have followed. The British people are the worst instructed in foreign affairs of any great people in the wide world. The Foreign Office has become more and more the centre of a life absolutely artificial in its methods, its ceremonies, its views of the government and life of States. It turned up its nose at British commercial interests and regarded them as Rob Roy did the shopkeeping pursuits of Bailie Nicol Jarvie. A simply told story of the Foreign Office, its mind and methods, would be in relation to modern government what the gaudily liveried beefeaters of the Tower are to the modern policeman. The points at which it comes in contact with other States are the Embassy Ball and the Court function on the one hand, and the haunts of the spy and the scoundrel on the other.’

He goes on to maintain that :

‘The Foreign Office has demanded as essential to its continuance not only secrecy but deceit, and it has received



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sanction for both in abundant measure. In no other class of State transactions have the sacred rites of honour and just dealing been more consciously, and almost on principle, violated. Given the existing conditions of diplomacy ; its secrecy and the world of risks and uncertainties which it creates, no nation can wisely hang the sword to rust on its walls. Force is its reality. It plays its great games, masquerades in its grand ceremonies, studies its correct demeanours, and, when the powers behind it are mature, its own work sweeps it off the stage and, after an instant of darkness, the lights are turned up upon marching armies.'

It would be difficult to find a more vehement denunciation of the Foreign Office, its personnel and methods, than this.

Just before accepting the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, MacDonald wrote :

' Foreign Offices have been run to keep Courts and not peoples in contact with each other. They have belonged to the mechanism of autocracy—not to that of democracy. If the new after-the-war world has been taught anything, it will end all that. It will make foreign affairs as open to public opinion as home affairs. The idea that in the official relations and discussions of nations there is something which makes autocracy and secrecy the condition of wisdom and safety is a pure myth. A Foreign Secretary ought to live with the nations. His wisdom is to publish much and conceal little, to inform fully and keep no one in ignorance. Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel clear to the world. Peace and goodwill are maintained in the forum—not in the arsenal. They belong to the mind of peoples—not to the treaties hidden away in archives.'

It is remarkable that one who wrote in this strain could become the most secretive and aloof Foreign Secretary in British history. In spite of all this—perhaps because of it—there is no doubt that the post of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had many attractions for MacDonald. It made him an international figure by putting him directly in the spotlight of international publicity. He had always preferred foreign affairs to domestic concerns. The alleged non-Party nature of foreign affairs made them safer. Apart

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from the prestige and importance of the office, there was a romantic glamour about it that appealed strongly to MacDonald's sentimental side. There was the mystery, the hush-hush, the cloak and sword secret service and all that. There were, moreover, the aristocratic associations of the Foreign Office. Lordlings are as natural in Downing Street as are pigeons in Trafalgar Square.

MacDonald was by nature a secretive person, and the awesome secrecy allured him. He would be thrilled by being admitted to the sacred circle and made aware of the inner mysteries of the Foreign Office. As it turned out, there is reason to believe that MacDonald was not trusted fully by the chiefs of the staff. It was suspected that important documents were withheld from him and, on occasion, action was taken on important matters without his knowledge. There was a reluctance to take the risk of initiating an outsider into the inner secrets of diplomacy.

MacDonald had travelled widely and studied foreign affairs. He was proud, and justly so, of his diplomatic skill. By nature an intriguer, he was keen to try his hand against the professionals of the craft.

The advent of a Foreign Secretary who was not of the genealogy of Canning or Castlereagh, Palmerston or Peel, was a minor revolution. There had once been a Prime Minister who was a poor man's son, Lloyd George, but never a Foreign Secretary from below the ranks of the *bourgeoisie*. MacDonald's entry was a surprise, but a pleasant surprise. The officials seem to have expected a horny-handed, unlettered, strident-voiced Labour Leader. Instead, they found one of distinguished appearance and charming manners, who was eager and able to learn and who was as keen as they were to maintain not only the historical tradition of diplomatic ceremonial, but also continuity of policy. The gradualism of his economic policy was to be his policy in foreign affairs.

When MacDonald went to the Foreign Office, he found that the executive head was Sir Eyre Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary. He was a remarkable personality, a queer survival of Victorian days. He was decisively pro-French. Indeed the whole attitude of the Foreign Office had been the well-known 'Hats off to France' attitude. Queen Victoria,

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the adoring wife of a German, could not help being entirely pro-German. Personal reasons made King Edward pro-French, and he was the father of the *Entente Cordiale*. Under his influence, the focus of Royal favour swung from Berlin to Paris. King Edward was fond of the French and spent a good deal of his time in Paris or on the French Riviera. So the Pro-French tradition grew stronger in the Foreign Office and reached its culmination during the War. There is no doubt that Sir Eyre Crowe had as certainly a controlling influence over MacDonald as he had had over Grey in those fateful days before 1914. Crowe was thus able to have his way and prevent anything being done to carry out the policy to which the Labour Party had repeatedly been pledged with regard to the Versailles Treaty and Reparations.

The revision of the Versailles Treaty was still the policy of the Party. Mr. Arthur Henderson, the Home Secretary, was at that time out of Parliament and was fighting Burnley in a by-election. In the course of his campaign, he reaffirmed the policy of the revision of the Versailles Treaty. This was at once pounced on by the Conservative Party, and Mr. Ronald MacNeill, a genial Goliath and a former Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, asked the Prime Minister if the policy of Henderson was the policy of the Government. Not getting an answer to please him, he moved the adjournment of the House to call attention to the terrible indiscretion of Henderson. The Speaker granted leave. A feature of the subsequent debate was the intervention of Mr. Lloyd George in strong repudiation of the policy of revision and the fierce attack he made on Henderson. The most outstanding incident of the debate, however, was the vigorous attack by MacDonald on the mischievous tactics of an ex-Minister in bringing this question forward at a time of critical negotiations for mere Party and partisan purposes.

The most noteworthy achievement of MacDonald's term of office as Foreign Secretary was his success in bringing about a more peaceful situation in Europe. For the first time since the War, and in the first week of his taking office, he brought the French and German journalists together in friendly conference. On the fall of the Poincaré Government, MacDonald opened negotiations with M. Herriot, the new French Premier.

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M. Herriot visited MacDonald at Chequers, and MacDonald visited Herriot in Paris. The result was the agreement to meet in the London Conference in August.

The Conference was called to consider the Dawes Plan, which, in an oratorical flight, MacDonald described as a document that would bring peace and security. It was, and professed to be, nothing more than an expert examination of the most effective method of extorting reparations from Germany. After a series of crises, an instrument, thereafter known as the London Settlement, was signed on 16 August 1924. It incorporated an agreed method of putting the Dawes Plan into operation immediately. It contained an undertaking for the evacuation of the Ruhr, to begin forthwith and be completed within twelve months' time. It was in this sphere of foreign affairs that MacDonald achieved his greatest success. There is no doubt that the authority, tact, and skill with which MacDonald conducted the proceedings were successful, in so far as success was possible. This question of Reparation Payments by Germany, which had been the bone of contention in twelve international conferences, and had led to the fall of many administrations in Central and Western Europe, reached a temporary settlement. Ponsonby's remarkable success in the negotiating of the Russian Treaties was cancelled for the time being by the fall of the Labour Government.

What is admitted by all to have been a great personal triumph was the speech by which MacDonald opened the Conference of fifty-four nations at Geneva. Unfortunately, like most of MacDonald's foreign conferences, nothing came of it in the way of permanent result, but his presence there exemplifies his method. His rôle was histrionic and oratorical, rather than diplomatic. He was the dominating figure of the opening meeting. When he had delivered his speech and, so to speak, dropped his pebble in the pool of publicity, he hied him home to Scotland.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *THE FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT*

**M**onday, 21 January 1924, saw the curtain rise on one of the most momentous incidents in the history of the British Parliament. For the first time in the annals of the country, which is one of the bulwarks of Conservatism in Europe, a capitalist Government was giving way to a Government made up, with two exceptions, of avowed Socialists, under the leadership of a man who, a few years before, had been violently attacked by Press, Platform, and Pulpit. Verily the wheel had turned full circle.

When, on 12 February, MacDonald made his way to the House, crowds were everywhere. The new Premier was cheered heartily as he passed through the gates of the Palace of Westminster. There are always greater crowds in the precincts of Westminster when a Labour Government is in office. The people seem more interested; an atmosphere of hope, of expectancy, prevails. There was not a vacant seat in the House when MacDonald rose to make his first speech as Prime Minister. He was cheered on all sides, and it was noticeable that, on this first meeting of the new Parliament, there was no evidence of the antagonism that was so shortly to develop.

He began his speech with an earnest appeal to be given a chance. It is somewhat revealing that, even in 1924, his mind was running on the idea of a National Government, and he was expressing the hope that this Government of which he was the head might be so regarded.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘that we will have less to say about Party and less to think about Party than we have had hitherto, and that we shall lay more and more emphasis upon the responsibility of individual Members of this House of voting as responsible Members of the House and not merely as Party politicians.’

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He was enough of a Parliamentarian to know all the dodges with which an unfriendly Opposition can obstruct and even destroy a Government.

‘I have a lively recollection,’ he went on, ‘of all sorts of ingenuities practised by Oppositions in order to spring a snap division upon a Government, so that it might turn it out upon a defeat. I have known bathrooms downstairs utilized, not for their legitimate purpose, but for the illegitimate purpose of packing as many Members surreptitiously inside their doors as their physical limitations would allow. I have known an adjoining building, where there happens to be a convenient Division Bell, used for similar purposes. I have seen the House, practically empty when the bells began to ring, suddenly transformed into a very riotous sort of market-place by the inrush of Members, doing their best for their nation, for the House of Commons, and for their Party, to find a Government napping, and to turn it out upon a stupid issue.’

He was not going out on any such issue.

He then proceeded to define the issue which would compel resignation.

‘The Labour Government will go out if it be defeated upon substantial issues, issues of principle, issues that really matter. It will go out if the responsible leaders of either Party or any Party move a direct vote of no confidence and carry that vote. But I propose to introduce my business, knowing that I am in a minority, and claiming the privileges that attach to those responsibilities.’

He had not been speaking for many minutes when the fluty falsetto of Sir Kingsley Wood was heard. MacDonald’s most pertinacious antagonist was deliberately endeavouring to throw the Premier off his balance by an interruption, just as he was at the most important part of his speech, when the orator was earnestly endeavouring to establish sympathetic contact with his audience.

MacDonald brushed him aside and went on undisturbed. His purpose was reassurance; he sought to stress his political orthodoxy and to allay anxiety.

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'The country,' he said, 'sooner or later has to become acquainted with the driving hand of labour, and I am very glad that it has come sooner. I feel perfectly certain that such stories as those told by Sir Robert Horne, when he set foot in this country, apparently at a time of the most excessive mental distress, after his arrival from Canada and his disembarkation from a stormy sea, such statements as he made regarding, not what is in our mind, but what is in our nature—a somewhat different thing—regarding, not what we would deliberately set out to do, but what we were bound to do by the laws of God Himself—being Labour, to destroy the nation, destroy its credit, make capital fly off in a state of wild excitement and terror and so on—the sooner that sort of thing is proved to be sheer rubbish the better it will be for everyone concerned. I hope that the experience which the country and the Empire are to have of a Labour Government will make it absolutely impossible for any such statements to be made or any such ideas to be held.'

This rather confused statement is typical of MacDonald's House of Commons style as contrasted with his platform style.

When he had thus disposed of the well-known representative of big business, finance, and the City, MacDonald proceeded to deal with the legislative programme of the Government. He spoke of such questions as the Imperial Conference Resolutions, Treaties, Imperial Wireless, Ex-Servicemen's Pensions, Old Age Pensions, Housing, Unemployment, National Debt, Agriculture, Wages Boards, Russian Agreements and Credits, and, finally, of Armaments and the League of Nations.

There had been offers and appeals from the Liberals for co-operation with the Labour Government on a common programme for a number of years. MacDonald deals with that in a final word, which has a peculiar significance in view of his own subsequent actions.

'Coalitions are detestable, are dishonest. It is far better, I am perfectly certain, for the political life of our country, and for the respect in which we desire to be held by colleagues who disagree with us that we should express our views as an independent political Party, bring those views before

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the House of Commons, and ask it to take the responsibility of amending, accepting, or rejecting them.'

Mr. Asquith, next day, in a friendly reply on behalf of the Liberals, paid tribute to the mildness of the Prime Minister's speech. There were two sets of people who would be disappointed with that speech.

'A lady,' he remarked with a twinkle, 'one of my correspondents—they are not by any means all of one sex—wrote to me a few weeks ago and expressed the fervent hope that a place had been reserved for me in the lowest abyss of hell, because I aided and abetted in the advent of a Labour Government. I hope that, on reading the right hon. gentleman's speech this morning, she has some sort of solace.'

u there was another set of disappointed people.

'The ardent spirits who sit there on what in the Convention used to be called the Mountain and who are more numerous outside, who thought that the fiery finger of dawn could be discerned the moment my right hon. friend became Prime Minister, are no doubt for the moment a little bit dispirited. They had hopes of a more far-reaching and full-blooded programme. I think that we ought to make allowances for the conditions under which their leaders have been called upon to assume office. I would remind those fire-eaters, as an old parliamentarian, that you cannot achieve legislation on an heroic scale when you are in a permanent minority in this House, and when, in consequence of that, you are denuded of an apparatus which every Government for the last thirty or forty years has possessed—the power of taking the time of the House, of moving the Closure, and of regulating its proceedings in accordance with your wishes. It is not only common sense, but it is common fairness to admit that any Government that took office under these Parliamentary conditions is to a certain extent, compared with all its predecessors which many of us have known, in fetters and manacles. That, I think, is obviously true.'

Thus was the stage set for the play that was to follow—



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a play that had elements of tragedy, of comedy, and sometimes even of farce.

The first Labour Prime Minister in this country took office under the worst possible conditions. He had not a fair chance of answering effectively Churchill's jibe of Labour being 'unfit to govern.' This was not only due to the minority position which the Party held in Parliament, but because of the national and international conditions, political and economic, that prevailed at the moment that MacDonald took office. There was a mess at home and abroad to be cleaned up ; the fourth winter of unemployment had begun ; industrial conditions were so bad that several great strikes were threatened ; the discontent of the working classes had been increased by cuts in wages and a progressive lowering of the standard of life ; agriculture was going from bad to worse and threatened shortly to be a ruined industry, unless something drastic was done at once. Housing conditions were also getting worse, owing to a nation-wide shortage of houses ; there was a demand for more and better houses. From Ireland came low growling ; that consistent trouble-maker was on the edge of revolt. India, Egypt, Irak, and Turkey were seething with discontent, and the position in all of them was critical.

The worst handicap of all was from what is known as the Left Wing of the Party. These were mostly extremist members of the I.L.P. There had been mild disagreement between certain members of the rank and file and their leaders ever since the Labour Party had been formed in 1900, but that was nothing like the criticism and opposition to leaders that began and rapidly increased after the election of 1922. All through 1923, constant bickerings occurred between the back benches and the front. The chief offenders were some of the new Members from the Clydeside. Again and again these malcontents sought and received the applause of their political opponents when they attacked their leaders from the rear. The chief target for their attack was MacDonald, but other Ministers got their share. No Minister, however, displayed such keen discomfort and acute suffering as did the Prime Minister. His higher sensitive nature winced as the blows went home, and he would look round as if in plaintive appeal for leniency and mercy.

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While the Labour Party were in Opposition, this sniping, although irritating, could be ignored ; but when Labour took Office and when Labour Ministers in the most trying circumstances were endeavouring to do their utmost to conduct their departments with energy and efficiency, it became particularly embarrassing and offensive. The fact that Mr. John Wheatley, the real leader of the Scots Socialists, was a Member of the Government, toned down to some extent the criticism. The Ministry of Labour was strongly attacked, as unemployment was then, as now, the most important question of the day. Although Mr. William Adamson was a Scot, that did not save him from his disgruntled compatriots.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *'BISCUITS'*

**I**t was one day in the summer of 1924 that a curious inquirer, scanning the transfer lists at Somerset House, came upon an entry that made him prick up his ears and take notice. It was that Mr. Alexander Grant had made Mr. Ramsay MacDonald a gift of 30,000 shares in the prosperous biscuit manufacturing concern of Messrs. McVitie and Price. Behind this incident lies a story the thread of which leads from Downing Street through Somerset House northward in space, and back in time, to two little towns in Morayshire, and two boys that lived there years before. Sir Alexander Grant's father and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's uncle lived near each other in Morayshire. They had been guards on the Highland Railway, and so the son and nephew were thrown together in their boyhood. Grant became an apprentice baker ; MacDonald a clerk, a journalist, a secretary, and a politician. Grant became wealthy ; MacDonald became famous. The story of Sir Alexander Grant's life, his progress from poverty to affluence, is the story of many another Scots 'lad o' pairts' who makes good, with, in his case, in addition to extraordinary energy and ambition, more than his due share of luck. His consistent progress from the little baker's shop in the street of the small country town to the baronial mansion is in the tradition of 'Self Help.' The industry of the assiduous apprentice is rewarded, and he becomes a master.

Mr. Alexander Grant, head of the very successful firm of biscuit manufacturers, Messrs. McVitie and Price of Edinburgh, gave generously to charity and other good causes. Among his benefactions was the sum of £100,000 towards the founding of a Scottish National Library. Lord Macmillan, a distinguished Scots lawyer and Lord Advocate in the first Labour Government, reveals the manner in which this

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donation was made, in a story that contradicts the well-advertised falsehood of Scots niggardliness. The Right Hon. H. P. Macmillan, K.C., as he then was, says :

‘The circumstances of Mr. Grant’s benefaction were, I venture to think, unique, for when his banker handed me Mr. Grant’s signed cheque the amount was blank, and I was told to fill it in myself, which I did for £100,000. A further sum of £100,000 has since been given by Sir Alexander towards the cost of erecting a new and worthy building to house the Scottish National Library. To such benefactions the word “magnificent” may well be applied.’

In due course, the little tit-bit of news of MacDonald’s windfall was wafted down Fleet Street to the office of the *Daily Mail*. There the city editor, in a Stock Exchange article, drew attention to the fact that MacDonald, the Prime Minister, a Socialist, who condemned Capitalism, had himself become a bloated Capitalist. The Press, beyond a sneering reference, did not at first accuse MacDonald of anything but inconsistency. The matter took a turn both sinister and sensational, however, when, in the subsequent Honours List, it was found that the generous donor of the biscuit shares had been rewarded with a baronetcy. This item of news was immediately hooked up with the former item, and here was what journalists call a ‘story.’ The significance was instantly recognized, and the announcement was ‘splashed’ on the ‘front page.’

The result was an outcry in the Press from one end of the country to the other. To make matters worse, there was not only the story of the 30,000 shares ; there was also, it was discovered, the gift, by the same donor, of a magnificent Daimler motor-car. Here was a Prime Minister, and a Labour Prime Minister at that, accepting these splendid gifts and rewarding the donor, who happened to be a political opponent, with a baronetcy. A screaming protest was at once raised that MacDonald was trafficking in honours. He had bestowed the title after he had received the gifts ; therefore, the title was because of the gifts. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

At a time when every effort was being made to discredit the Labour Government, this sensational exposure was eagerly

caught up. The malicious attack was curiously personal. The enemy concentrated on MacDonald. In 1922 Philip Snowden had strongly opposed the selection of MacDonald as Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party on the ground that, so violent was the hatred of MacDonald in the country, the success of the Party in Parliament would be seriously retarded by having so unpopular a leader. The Labour Party at that time had the support of but one daily newspaper. Since the first day on which MacDonald took up his position as Leader of the Opposition, the attack had been continuous and had increased in virulence since he had become Prime Minister. Now, when the Press and the Conservative leaders were describing him as ‘an enemy of society’ and a ‘rogue’ and the Liberals were denouncing him as a ‘crook,’ it seemed as if Snowden’s prophecy was being fulfilled.

This accusation of graft was the beginning of a new campaign of vilification and belittlement. For months while the Labour Government lasted and, indeed, for years afterwards, Labour speakers had to meet this charge of corruption against their Leader. It was when the charge came at a public meeting that MacDonald felt it keenest of all. His enemies knew his sensitive vulnerability and attacked the more cruelly and unsparingly. In a great public meeting, as the orator was swaying the crowd along from image to image in a pictorial peroration, suddenly a voice—the voice of one crying in the audience—with an insistent urgency, hissed the single word : ‘Biscuits !’ The penetrative sibilation sounded clear, snapped the spell and instantly diverted the minds and eyes of all to the irrelevant interrupter. The effect on MacDonald was painful to see. He was struck momentarily dumb. He knew what the vicious ejaculation meant. Everyone who heard it knew the reference. It killed the speech.

The attitude of the House of Commons to this unfortunate business was interesting. Labour Members had been challenged with it in their constituencies. In the House of Commons, the matter was not referred to amongst themselves. There had been a hope that it might be possible in the new regime of a Labour Government that the Prime Minister’s power of patronage would not be exercised. Here was one way in which he might have made a difference without endangering

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his Government. Titles had always been scorned, and by no one more than MacDonald himself. It was rather a shock to Labour Members to find MacDonald following the old bad precedent.

The most persistent and ruthless tormentor of the Prime Minister had always been Sir Kingsley Wood. He had a most biting way of getting under the skin of the Leader of the Labour Party and making him wince by provocative question and sarcastic reference. MacDonald came to dread his rising to ask a question. On the matter of Sir Alexander Grant's title, Sir Kingsley Wood had no doubts whatever. He believed it to be simply a piece of graft on MacDonald's part. He was anxious to challenge the Prime Minister in the House of Commons with what he believed to be a shady deal, but the rules of the House are strictly drawn, and it was difficult to get a provocative question through the censorship of the Clerks at the Table. At last, however, he got a skilfully worded question on the Order Paper. It was whether the Prime Minister 'proposes to ask the House to make any increase in the salary now paid in respect of the office of the First Lord of the Treasury.'

When MacDonald's notice was called to the question, he at once saw through the game. He did not mind the question on the Paper so much. His very competent staff at 'Number 10' would supply him with an answer complete and adequate. What disturbed MacDonald was that he knew that it was a trap. It was merely an opening and would be the signal for the uprising of a crowd of young Tories all keen on scoring off the Prime Minister by teasing 'supplementaries.' The easier way to avoid answering an awkward question was for the Prime Minister to absent himself from the House and ask the Lord Privy Seal to deal with it.

Mr. Clynes resorted to the old device of referring Sir Kingsley Wood to a previous answer. This usually satisfies even the most pertinacious questioner, as he seldom takes the trouble to look up the previous answer. The purpose of a question is as often to get publicity as information. But Sir Kingsley Wood was an old hand at the game. His first question was merely the inconspicuous peg on which to hang the real question. He rose again and asked blandly: "Was

consideration given, before this decision was arrived at, to the fact that the present holder has found the emoluments of his office insufficient, and has had to go to a private citizen—— ? ” This reference to Sir Alexander Grant caused a shout of protest from the Labour Benches. Shouts of ‘ Dirty,’ ‘ Mean,’ ‘ Contemptible ’ rang out. The noise was deafening.

The Speaker rose and said angrily : “ I must insist upon hon. Members allowing me to conduct the business of the House. I shall not continue unless I have proper support.” “ We are not going to be insulted,” cried Jack Jones, Labour Member for Silvertown. “ Name, name,” cried the Members, hoping that the Speaker would suspend the insulted Irish-Londoner. The Speaker warned Jack Jones and then reprimanded Sir Kingsley Wood. “ The hon. Member for West Woolwich attempted to put a supplementary question which he knew quite well I should not allow to appear on the Paper.”

These incidents are not, in themselves, worth mentioning. Malicious ejaculations are often heard in the House of Commons during debate, and ‘ the voice ’ is frequently in evidence in public meetings. Their significance and importance lie in the effects that they had on MacDonald’s peculiar temperament. A few words, sharply clear, would break in with harsh discord on a harmonious gathering, and the reactions, physical, psychological, and moral, would be remarkable. Physically, when the vocal missile struck him, he looked like one who had been impaled with a spear. Momentarily losing the thread of his discourse, he digressed, repeated himself, and took some time before he re-established control. The psychological effects were more important. He was always wondering why he should be so attacked. ‘ Why are these people so incensed against me ? ’ he would ask. He was certainly not conscious of any ‘ sense of sin,’ but completely confirmed in his own sacrificial scrupulousness.

No, the Conservatives had not forgiven. They had not believed MacDonald. They had not accepted his explanations. To them he had sold the title to Mr. Alexander Grant. The price had been a Daimler car and 30,000 shares ; now, two years afterwards, they were reminding him of his guilt. Of course, honours and titles have been bought and sold in this country for centuries. There was, indeed, an unconscious

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compliment in their hypocritical simulation of righteous indignation. It attributed a higher moral code to the Socialist than to any of the other two Parties. There would have been nothing dishonest or dishonourable in a mere Conservative or Liberal Prime Minister distributing titles for a 'consideration,' but for a professed Socialist to stoop to such malpractices was intolerable.

Although the principal newspapers advertised the facts and stressed the insinuation, very few considered MacDonald's explanations worth any space whatever. The explanation given of the 'Biscuits' and 'Motor-car' incidents in one of the biographies of Mr. MacDonald is ridiculous.

'After MacDonald took office,' it reads, 'Sir Alexander learned that the Prime Minister, at the end of tiring days at the Foreign Office and Downing Street, was travelling home to Hampstead by Underground. Often unrecognized, he was forced at busy times to "strap-hang" all the way to the northern suburb.'

The fact is that, after MacDonald took office, he removed from Hampstead to Downing Street. The Foreign Office is just the width of a lane from 'Number 10.' Why should he be going to Hampstead after a tiring day at the Foreign Office and Downing Street?

The short sentence of explanation and excuse is only five lines in length, but contains ten untruths. Mr. Grant did not learn of MacDonald's pilgrimage to Hampstead by Tube, because it did not happen. Then the Prime Minister rarely spent a day at the Foreign Office or 'Number 10,' and it must be remembered that 'Number 10' was his London home. Several days a week he had to be at the House of Commons to answer questions in the afternoon, and he never went back to Downing Street, unless to sleep. He never used the Underground when he was in office, for he had no need to do so. After he had been put out of office, he had to leave Downing Street and return to Hampstead, when he often travelled by Tube. That little bit about the Prime Minister of Great Britain strap-hanging in the Underground is a decorative, journalistic touch. It is not usual to 'strap-hang' in an empty carriage. As the House rarely rose before mid-



night, the Tubes were deserted, and there were always plenty of seats. The difficulty, indeed, with Members of Parliament in getting home after the House had risen was not to get a seat, but to get a train at all.

Such a storm of denunciation arose around this incident, however, that MacDonald was compelled to take note of the accusation, and endeavour to justify his action. His explanation of the Daimler gift was characteristic. “I explained,” said the Prime Minister, “that I would have been content with hiring a car, as, when I left office, I would probably be a poorer man than I had been.” “But I will endow it,” rejoined Sir Alexander. “Still I was unwilling,” added the Prime Minister. “I did not fancy myself as the owner of a motor-car. It was against the simplicity of my habits. I took a long time to be persuaded, and letters are in existence which reveal the minds of us. In the end, I agreed with this arrangement—a sum of money was to be invested in my name and the income I am to enjoy during my lifetime, so long as I keep a car, and, at my death, it is to revert to Sir Alexander Grant or his heirs. This is the full story of the incident.”

This apologetic defence was quite incredible. MacDonald, as a rule, did not go to the expense of hiring a car. He had never needed one. There are crowds of people embarrassingly anxious to lend a Prime Minister anything. The State does not provide the Prime Minister with a car. Chequers, the country mansion which Lord Lee of Fareham gave to the nation as a rest-house for Premiers, is several miles from a railway, and no conveyance was provided for visitors to the Prime Minister. It was Earl Baldwin, after his first term as Prime Minister, who gave a car to be used at Chequers for the conveyance of those who had not their own car, to take them from the railway station.

For many years MacDonald had been dependent on his friends for his transport. Mr. Harry Day, Sir Oswald Mosley, Lord Arnold, Miss Naismith, Earl de La Warr, and several others lent their cars during the term of their friendship. Thousands of public servants and others are supplied with cars or transport facilities by the State or Local Authorities. A Prime Minister’s time is precious, and it is but right that it should not be wasted. All these people performed a public

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service in lending their cars to the Prime Minister, and they ought to have been adequately compensated.

'When I left office,' said MacDonald, 'I would probably be a poorer man than I had been.'

As to the implication that the expenses of living in 'Number 10' are so great that a Prime Minister is poorer after than before he takes office, this has been an old grievance with all who have held the Premiership in recent times.

The nominal salary of a Prime Minister was £5000 a year. Three Prime Ministers—Baldwin, Lloyd George, and MacDonald—declared before a House of Commons Committee that this salary was not sufficient to meet the expenses and maintain the dignity of No. 10 Downing Street, and asked that, in future, Prime Ministers be paid at the rate of £7000.<sup>1</sup> This is a point of special interest to a Labour Prime Minister. Mr. John Burns said once that 'no man was worth more than £500 a year.' That was in his Socialist days, but when Mr. Asquith offered him the post of President of the Local Government Board at a salary of several times that maximum, he grasped the chance with both hands. When asked to reconcile his apparent inconsistency, he nonchalantly replied: "Oh, I just took the rate for the job."

There was considerable comment on MacDonald, a Socialist, taking to himself a post at £5000 a year, and at a Conference of the Labour Party he thought that some reply was called for. He said: "When I hear about salaries and so on, I am almost inclined to say to some of you: 'I will exchange my balance with you at the end of the year, even if I am not prepared to exchange my salary at the beginning of the year!'" There was loud laughter at this ingenuous disclaimer, and then MacDonald added: "You know that, from January to December, my dear daughter and everybody that looks after me practise the most religious frugality of a typical Scottish household."

It was one of the arguments for raising the Prime Minister's salary that No. 10 Downing Street was so large and required so large a staff. MacDonald told the Committee that, unless a Prime Minister was supported by his friends, he would be in a Poor Law institution soon after he left office, owing to

<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister's salary is now £10,000 per annum.

## ‘BISCUITS’

the heavy cost of keeping up his position while he was there. It is uncertain what MacDonald meant by the phrase ‘unless supported by his friends.’ He may have been referring to Lord Oxford, who, it was known, had for many years been in receipt of a pension of £3500 a year from his friend, Lord Cowdray. When the millionaire contractor died and left Mr. Asquith practically stranded, Lord Beaverbrook very generously came to his assistance and sent the hat round his Conservative and Liberal friends to save the veteran statesman from an age of penury.

“I did not fancy myself,” says MacDonald, “as the owner of a motor-car. It was against the simplicity of my habits.” This amazing statement deserves close consideration, as, whether his claim to be of simple habits is valid or not, it sheds some light on his estimate of values. Simplicity of habits is acclaimed by all as a virtue, especially in one who has risen from poverty. All the tendencies are for a man who has suffered privation to swing to the other extreme, should opportunity offer. The famished man is apt to overeat, when food reaches him. To be able to restrain, to spurn the luxury that most men seek, ‘to scorn delights and live laborious days’ is a self-denial that all men applaud. ‘I am a man of simple habits,’ MacDonald asserts. ‘Those who knew him would hardly give credence to this assertion. The word ‘simplicity’ applied to habits means plain, homely, unaffected, humble, and in a negative sense, something that is not elaborate, not sumptuous, not adorned and not complicated. The habits of MacDonald for many years were the absolute antithesis of every definition of simplicity. Indeed his love of luxury, his worship of wealth, his fondness for display, his social ambition were features of his character and supplied the meaning of his conduct. What is true is that, as he ascended the path towards power and prestige, he was increasingly able to indulge his Lucullan proclivities. The luxury of foreign travel is unattainable to a poor man, but MacDonald’s marriage gave him the means to enjoy it. After the traditional manner of the aristocracy, he made the grand tour in the first year of his married life. Moreover, he was often selected as a delegate to represent the Socialist Movement of this country in different parts of the world. The luxury of a manor house had also been

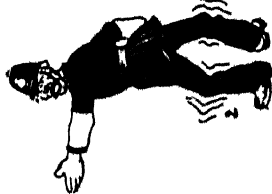
## THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD

his. Chequers, a magnificent Elizabethan residence, set in a beautiful country, was a charming retreat from the cares and worries of Downing Street.

Lord Haldane, in his *Autobiography*, after shrewdly referring to MacDonald's love for the pomp and glory of his position as Prime Minister, says :

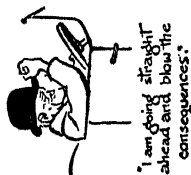
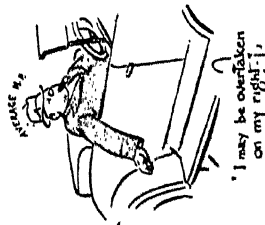
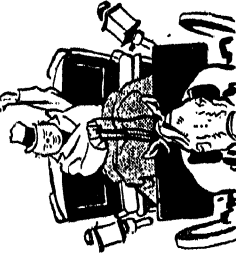
‘ Unfortunately, he had a passion for spending his week-ends at Chequers. When this generous gift was announced in the House of Lords, I rose and shook my head and prophesied that it would prove a dangerous temptation. Prime Ministers who have sprung from the middle classes and are attracted by the pleasures of a country-house life to which they are not accustomed are apt to be unduly drawn there. The result is that they lose two days, in each week, in which they ought to be seeing their colleagues and having at least a few of them for talk on the Saturday and Sunday evenings. It is, consequently, very difficult for a colleague to see his Chief at the only times when the latter can be readily available. This difficulty has not been confined to the case of Ramsay MacDonald. But with him it proved a damaging obstacle. It was almost impracticable to get hold of him, even for a quarter of an hour, and the consequences were at times mischievous.’

MacDonald had eagerly sought the friendship of Haldane. He always had a strong desire to mix with and be recognized as belonging to High Society. Haldane was one of the landed gentry of Scotland. He possessed one of the most magnificent castles in the Highlands, Cloan, a princely residence situated in the most beautiful part of Scotland. Haldane knew of MacDonald's working-class origin—that MacDonald belonged to a lower social caste than himself—and he feared that sudden access to power, influence and comparative affluence might have demoralizing effects on his character. To be, even for a time, one of the landed gentry stirred MacDonald to a keen and envious desire. Haldane's criticism was outspoken and candid. But even Lord Haldane, with all his shrewd insight, did not see to what lengths MacDonald's social ambitions would lead him in the end. His warnings had no effect, however, as MacDonald used Chequers more than any Prime Minister and took great delight in lording it as a *grand seigneur* even for a week-end.



① Constable's **STOP** signal for Baldwins approaching from his front, ② for Mosleys approaching from his rear, and ③ for Lloyd Georges approaching from both front and rear.

Constable's signal for **PROCEED**



"I am going to Turn to my right"

"No, I am going to Turn to my left."

"Ah, well, perhaps I am not going to do anything of the sort."

"I am going to drive round in circles until it snows."

"I am going straight ahead and blow the consequences."

"I am probably going up soon."

# NEW TRAFFIC SIGNALS.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### *THE RUSSIAN TREATY*

There has always been the bitterest hostility between the Conservatives and Russia. Almost every day for years the question of our relations with the Soviet Republic has been raised. Every term of abuse, every epithet of invective has been used against it. Churchill has been particularly vitriolic, but that only because his vocabulary of vituperation is more extensive and more forceful. In one passage, typical in its baleful malignity, he says : ' Russia, self-outcast, sharpens her bayonets in her Arctic night and mechanically proclaims through self-starved lips her philosophy of hatred and death.' He has been able to put into his denunciation every element, not only of antagonism, but of contempt and loathing. It may be added that, in doing this, he is only interpreting, in his own exaggerated idiom, the feelings of the Conservative Party.

This attitude was exemplified in a note sent by the late Lord Curzon, Foreign Secretary in 1923, to the Russian Government. The note was a typical Lord Curzon production, couched in haughty, peremptory terms, and it threatened to break off all trade relations with the Soviet. The Labour Party raised this question in the House of Commons with such success that the Government agreed to modify their ultimatum and announced that they were prepared to confer with the emissary of the Soviet Government.

MacDonald's attitude to Russia was known and appreciated by his political opponents. Mr. Baldwin quoted with emphasis, in the House of Commons, a rather startling sentence which MacDonald had used in connection with the Russian negotiations. The Prime Minister had said : ' The Labour Party will stand no nonsense and no monkey tricks from the Russian diplomatic representatives.' ' Can anyone imagine,' asked Mr. Baldwin, ' those words being used to the American or

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the French Ambassador? Does not that show that the Prime Minister himself recognizes that he is embarking on a task different in nature from that of bringing about peaceful relations with any other country in the world?'

MacDonald's policy of opportunism was nowhere so evident as in relation to Russia. Here he sought the middle course. He always hated extremism and he sought to propitiate the Opposition. The Labour Party, on the other hand, has at annual Conferences and elsewhere taken the opposite position. They have always sought to bring about, not only peaceful relations with Russia, but friendly co-operation.

At the annual Conference of the Labour Party held in London in June 1923, MacDonald moved a comprehensive resolution which defined the Party position regarding the more urgent matters of foreign policy. The motion protested against the occupation of the Ruhr by the French and Belgian military forces as an act of aggression and war. The Conference considered 'that this country should adopt a generous attitude in the matter of inter-allied debts, as part of a general settlement of the reparation problem and that the whole of the allied armies should be withdrawn immediately from German territory; and that a World Conference should be held to revise the Peace Treaties in accordance with the needs of European political and economic reconstruction.' On the important question of Russia, the Conference recorded its satisfaction with the Government as far as the Trade Agreement was concerned and 'further reaffirms its opinion that there can be no complete agreement upon British and Russian international policies until this country accords full recognition to the Russian Government.' When the Labour Government took office in 1924, it was pledged to take every possible action to create and maintain the friendliest relations with Russia. The Labour Party expected that a decision to that effect would be made at the first Cabinet.

The fact that Sir Eyre Crowe was opposed to any such course may have been influential in persuading the Prime Minister, who held the same view, from taking action. When rumours of the hostility of the Foreign Office began to leak out, there were protests from the Party. At a meeting of the Parliamentary Party, the question was raised and the Govern-

## THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD

ment was definitely asked to get a move on. Neil MacLean, the able and pertinacious Highlander from Glasgow, denounced the delay in the *Daily Herald*. The storm was rising. The Government was warned that a great protest meeting was being organized by the London Labour Party. Almost alone in the Cabinet, MacDonald held out for delay, until the clamour outside became so insistent that he was compelled to yield. The Soviet Republic was officially recognized.

The next step was the appointment of an Ambassador. France had sent an Ambassador immediately on recognizing Russia. Before taking office, MacDonald had decided to send an Ambassador. He had offered the post to Mr. (later Sir James) O'Grady, in a letter written by his own hand. The genial and popular leader of the Transport Workers was to go 'when we recognize the Soviet Government.' But nothing happened. O'Grady was fobbed off later with the Governorship of Tasmania in reluctant and inadequate recompense.

This was the first of the many abject surrenders that MacDonald made to the dominating interests that sought to thwart the Labour Policy. No Ambassador was sent, nor was Russia brought within the ambit of the Export Credits Scheme, although MacDonald, a few months before had given the pledge that 'a Labour Government would take immediate steps to begin trade in Russia by guarantees under the financial scheme for encouraging exports.' Strong influences were brought to bear on the Prime Minister; he yielded, and his pledge was broken.

When the Labour Government recognized the Soviet Government, arrangements were begun for calling an Anglo-Russian Conference to consider and decide on outstanding questions between the two countries. This conference met in April 1924, and deliberations were carried on into August, when final drafts of a General Treaty and a Treaty on Commerce and Navigation were agreed to. The Treaties were violently attacked both in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords. There were gross misrepresentations as to their terms, and there was censure on the secrecy of the negotiations. This was absolutely untrue. The fact is that a Press notice was issued after every conference of the delegates. A full report of each session would have been published, had the



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Labour Government lived long enough to do it. The 'drafts' were discussed in Parliament before the adjournment for the Recess. So anxious was the Government that the fullest publicity should be given to the negotiations that the Government took the unprecedented step of submitting the Treaties to Parliament before they were signed.

Except for an introductory oration, MacDonald took no part whatever in the negotiations, but left them in the very capable hands of Mr. Arthur (now Lord) Ponsonby, at that time Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The negotiations raised matters of extraordinary difficulty, and they were conducted throughout by Mr. Ponsonby with a skill, patience, and tact that was beyond all praise.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### THE CAMPBELL CASE

The first rumble of the earthquake which was to cause the collapse of the Labour Government was heard in the House of Commons on 30 July 1924, when one of a series of questions was put to the Home Secretary by Sir William Davison and Sir Gervais Rentoul, K.C. The Home Secretary was asked whether his attention had been called to the publication, in a paper known as the *Workers' Weekly*, of Friday, 25 July, of an open letter, addressed to the fighting forces of the Crown, calculated to undermine discipline and to create disaffection; and what action he proposed to take in the matter. This subject has always been one of irritation to the Conservatives, as many of them have served in one or other of the fighting Services. The reply of Mr. Rhys Davies, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, was that the Home Secretary was considering whether any action was called for in this matter. This answer called forth a loud protest from Conservative Members. Mr. Lansbury arose from the Treasury Bench and retorted that the Home Secretary should at the same time consider the fiasco which followed the prosecution of Tom Mann and others for issuing a similar pamphlet some years ago.

The Marquis of Titchfield asked a similar question on the following day. There was complete silence for a week, as far as the House of Commons was concerned, and then suddenly a Member, this time a Labour Member, Mr. John Scurr, intervened to ask a private notice question. The Home Secretary was asked why police officers had been instructed to raid the offices of the *Workers' Weekly* and to arrest the Editor; what charges had been laid against the Editor; under which statute he was being prosecuted; whether any further prosecutions were pending, and under whose instructions the present proceedings were instituted. The reply of the Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Hastings) was:

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‘My attention was called by the Director of Public Prosecutions to an article in the *Workers’ Weekly*, which, in my opinion, constituted a breach of the law. In consequence, the Director of Public Prosecutions has been engaged in the necessary steps to ascertain the identity of the persons responsible for the article. The Editor has accepted the responsibility and has been arrested. The raid and the arrest were carried out on the authority of a warrant granted by a stipendiary magistrate. The Editor is being charged with an alleged offence against the Incitement to Mutiny Act, 1795. I am not prepared to state whether any charge will be preferred against any other person.’

The answer caused a wave of surprise and indignation among the Labour Members, and Maxton expressed the feelings of most of them, when he directed a question at MacDonald, who sat beside the Attorney-General on the Treasury Bench. He asked the Prime Minister if he had read the article upon which the charge was based, and if he was aware that the article contained merely a call to the troops not to allow themselves to be used in industrial disputes. The Prime Minister ignored Maxton’s question, and the Speaker tried to avoid further trouble by explaining that, as the matter was now *sub judice*, the House could not discuss it.

There was evidently considerable feeling among the Labour Members. The back benches were again in revolt against the front. They did not blame Sir Patrick Hastings so much, for, after all, he was only a new-comer to the Labour Party; he evidently did not realize how strong was the stand they took on personal liberty and how sensitive they were to any infringement of the freedom of the Press. The resentment was mainly against MacDonald. They knew that he was not at all enthusiastic on the Russian Treaty. They had observed that he was strongly and naturally resentful of Communist attacks on himself, and they suspected that he would welcome, for several reasons, any chance to attack them. Sir Patrick Hastings was personally very popular. Many of the Labour Members were convinced that MacDonald, if he did not actually condone the Attorney-General’s action, was not averse from it. There was a feeling that Sir Patrick Hastings was

## THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAT MACDONALD

merely the mouthpiece of MacDonald. The hands were Esau's hands, but the voice was the voice of Jacob.

The Speaker's attempt to mollify the angry Labour Members was unavailing. The tumult continued, several Members standing at once, and seeking to catch the Speaker's eye. At last, Mr. Jack Jones, the witty Irish-Londoner from Silvertown, succeeded, and, amid shouts of protest from the Conservatives, asked leave to move the adjournment of the House. Interjections, interruptions, cross-talk, and noise continued. Lansbury, Kenworthy, and Scurr were allowed to offer suggestions. Then Mr. Tom Dickson, a well-liked Member, caught the Speaker's eye. He had a sensational question to ask. He asked the Attorney-General whether, if any Members of the House who would be speaking in their constituencies in the following week expressed similar opinions to that contained in the article in the *Workers' Weekly*, they should be subject to similar prosecution. There was a shout of 'Yes,' 'Yes,' from the Opposition benches. Mr. Dickson waved a deprecatory hand towards the Treasury Bench. 'If so,' he said, 'they will probably lose half their Party.' This was a threat and was accepted as such by those on the Treasury Bench.

There was no doubt that this definite demonstration of disapproval came as a shock to Sir Patrick Hastings. He had not realized the real significance and consequences of his action. He was worried and anxious to do the right thing. In the first place, he determined to find out all the facts of the case. He sent for Maxton. He then learned that the man Campbell was not the Editor of the *Workers' Weekly*, but was only acting temporarily for the Editor, who was away ill.

'He told me something of the man's past history,' said Sir Patrick Hastings, 'and, mark you, I am accustomed to defending people, and I thought to myself at once, what my position would be if I were defending counsel and the Attorney-General had picked out, as the one dangerous Communist whom he wanted to put in the dock, a man described as a man who had had both his feet almost blown off in the War, who fought through the War from beginning to end, and who had been decorated for exceptional gallantry. I thought to myself what I would look like, supposing that

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this were true, as the Attorney-General of England, putting in the dock at the Old Bailey, as the only dangerous Communist whom I could find, such a person as that.'

Having heard Maxton's story and having consulted the best legal opinion available, the Attorney-General decided to withdraw the case in the higher interests of the State.

There is no doubt that he did this on his own responsibility, but there were certain circumstances which might give weight to the entirely erroneous suggestion that he had been influenced by other than legal considerations. There was the threat that other Members of the Labour Party would use in their speeches the very words used by the *Workers' Weekly* and challenge the Government to arrest them. Then there was the defiant attitude of the Communists. They had boasted that, if the case were pressed, they were determined to put the Prime Minister in the witness-box. They declared that they would engage Sir John Simon or Sir Douglas Hogg to put him through a third-degree cross-examination. There is no doubt that, judging from the opinion that these two gentlemen held of MacDonald at that time, they would have put him on the rack, not only with alacrity, but with the keenest delight. Moreover, the Communists had raked up a powerful speech of the Prime Minister, made in the House of Commons on 4 June 1912, in which he made an earnest and impressive appeal on behalf of Mr. Tom Mann, who had been accused of an exactly similar offence—namely, advising soldiers not to shoot strikers during a trade dispute.

These circumstances, of course, lent weight to the suggestion that the Attorney-General had yielded to political pressure. All who knew of either the courage or the integrity of Sir Patrick Hastings were convinced that this charge of submitting to pressure was untrue. Those who did not know learned later.

8 October 1924 will be a red-letter day in the history of British politics, for it was on that date that the first Labour Government fell, after a most exciting debate in the House of Commons. Throughout the whole day, there was an atmosphere of crisis. To the ordinary spectator, the result was uncertain until the end, but behind the scenes could be heard the busy whisper of intrigue.

## THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD

The debate opened badly for the Government. The Prime Minister had to begin with an apology for misleading the House in answer to a question a week before. He had been asked by Sir Kingsley Wood whether any directions had been given by him, or with his sanction, to the Director of Public Prosecutions to withdraw the proceedings against Mr. Campbell, the Editor of the *Workers' Weekly*, and whether he had received any intimation that he would be personally required to give evidence on behalf of the defendant at the hearing. In replying, the Prime Minister had declared that he had not been consulted and that the first information that he had obtained had been from the Press. As this was apt to give a wrong impression and since, as a matter of fact, he had actually been advised by the Attorney-General that he intended to drop the case, he asked leave to amend his answer to that extent. There was really nothing of moment in this, and, indeed, the matter need never have been mentioned ; if there was any misunderstanding in the original answer, the explanation made things worse. Not only so, but the Prime Minister was openly jeered at, and his humiliating apology was made in vain. It was seized upon, however, by the Conservatives, and Mr. Austen Chamberlain rose again and again and subjected the Prime Minister to the most rigorous and decisive cross-examination. Back and forth across the floor flashed the rhetorical battle. The Prime Minister was indignant and refused to amplify his answer. Mr. Chamberlain was persistent. Then came a rather confused answer from the Prime Minister. The Tory Leader continued his heckling ; the Prime Minister replied petulantly. Sir John Simon then butted in with true lawyer-like pertinacity ; the Prime Minister was compelled to repeat his answer.

It was in a House excited and ill-tempered by these exchanges that Sir Robert Horne rose to move a vote of censure on the Government. He was one of the cleverest lawyers in Parliament—a wonderful, extempore speaker and a cool, keen debater. A provocative reference to Poplar drew a protest from Mr. Lansbury and threatened to lead to disorder, when the Speaker, noting the excited state of the House, rose and issued a timely warning that he would allow no interruptions. This appeal had its effect, and Sir Robert Horne was allowed

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to proceed in quiet and order. The case put by him was that the Prime Minister had interfered with the course of justice in that he had been compelled by pressure from the extremists in his Party to drop the case against Campbell. Horne quoted the claim in a later issue of the *Workers' Weekly* that perhaps for the first time in England's fair island history the course of justice in the Law Courts had been changed by outside political forces into a triumph for the working classes over the Capitalist classes, not by scoring a legal success, but by a plain revolutionary victory. The whole contention of Sir Robert Horne was that the Communists were right in making this claim, and that MacDonald had been intimidated and frightened into an interference with the proper administration of the law. It was all too evident throughout his speech that, in spite of his polite phrases, he was directing a bitter attack on the Labour Government and particularly on the Prime Minister. There was a complete change of atmosphere in the House when the cold, forensic argumentation of Sir Robert Horne ended.

The House stirred to a closer and more interested attention as Sir Patrick Hastings was seen to be standing quietly at the famous brass-bound box waiting his call. The speech of the Attorney-General was a personal triumph. Point by point he took the charges against him and tore them to ribbons. He produced documents ; he cited legal opinion ; he quoted cases. One point he disposed of with an annihilating conclusiveness. Sir Robert Horne had sought to indicate that the taking into account of the question of policy was unprecedented and without warrant. Confidently, the Attorney-General took up the challenge and surprised the House by announcing that he would read a letter which, written five years before, had been directed to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It ran :

‘ My dear Director—There can be no doubt, I think, that this speech is seditious and that a prosecution may properly follow, but it appears to me that the real question is one of policy, and, therefore, it is a question in the first instance for the Home Secretary and the Minister of Labour. Yours sincerely, Gordon Hewart.’

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The cases were so exactly parallel, the precedent so convincingly established, that it did not need the authority of a great name for its support. It had that name, however—no less an authority than the Lord Chief Justice of England himself.

One of the most pungent points in his case was when he turned on his fellow lawyer, Lord Birkenhead, and smote with crushing effect. The ex-Lord Chancellor had pilloried the Attorney-General as being guilty of departing from the high reputation of his office. Lord Birkenhead had rather loftily claimed that, when he was Attorney-General, he refused to institute a prosecution at the instance of the War Cabinet. Sir Patrick Hastings quoted Lord Birkenhead's words and then read an instruction from a conference presided over by Mr. Lloyd George in May 1917, which repudiated the then Attorney-General's claim, and peremptorily instructed him to initiate certain specified prosecutions. This was a clear precedent for taking into account and providing for the political implications of an action taken by the judiciary.

All the real force went out of the indictment when the Attorney-General ended. There seemed no more to be said. Any fair-minded person would see that Sir Patrick Hastings had been completely vindicated. Indeed, another distinguished lawyer, Sir Reginald Mitchell Banks, K.C., who spoke later in the debate, said that, after hearing the speech of the Attorney-General, he had come to the conclusion that the speech he had prepared against the Government must be relegated to the waste-paper basket. He had been so convinced of the unfairness of the attack on the Government that he had decided to vote against his own Party. Still another brilliant young Tory lawyer, Mr. J. J. O'Neill, boldly declared that, after hearing the defence, he had come to the conclusion that the prosecution was unfair, that the attack on the Government was unfair, and that, therefore, he had decided to vote with the Labour Government.

The debate really narrowed down to one vital and determining point. It was whether, in view of the uproar caused by the initiation of the prosecution and the threat to embarrass the Prime Minister, any pressure had been brought to bear on the Attorney-General to make him reverse his decision and drop the persecution. On this the Attorney-General had given



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his definite word of honour. There was not a man who heard Sir Patrick Hastings put his case that day who did not believe him absolutely. If he alone were involved, the debate would have ended when he sat down. He had moved the House by his manifest honesty, his frank sincerity and conscientious integrity. Whether he had misjudged one way or the other, Members unanimously acquitted him of either deception or misrepresentation.

The real purpose that lay behind the debate was revealed when Sir John Simon rose to move the Liberal amendment and launched out into an attack of vicious and cynical defamation on the Prime Minister. He referred to the scenes that followed the Prime Minister's apology at question time and sneered at the vagueness and ambiguity of MacDonald's answers.

The Liberal amendment was that a Select Committee be appointed to investigate and report upon the circumstances leading up to the withdrawal of the proceedings recently instituted by the Director of Public Prosecutions against Mr. Campbell.

When the Prime Minister came to reply, his first words indicated how keenly he resented the taunts of Sir John Simon, and he showed a quite unusual pugnacity in his indignant contradiction of the charges of the Liberal lawyer. He explained that, whatever views were expressed by Ministers, were certainly not urged because of Party considerations. Ministers knew and appreciated the fact that responsibility for a decision rested with the Law Officers. The speech of the Prime Minister gained strength as he proceeded. To those who were calling for his head the Prime Minister defiantly retorted that, if the House were not disposed to give the Government a satisfactory measure of confidence, they could not go on.

'If,' he added, 'the House passes either of the resolutions on the paper, then we go. It will be the end of what has been a high adventure which has contributed to the honour of the country and social stability, and which, when the country has had an opportunity of passing a verdict upon us, will come again.'

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Never before, and certainly never since, have the Labour Members cheered their Leader as they did that night. Their champion had been insulted ; the Government had been attacked ; the Prime Minister was striking back good and hard, and they liked him best in the combative mood.

The contribution of Mr. Asquith to the debate was remarkable, not only from the fact that it was his last speech in the House of Commons, but from the characteristic merits of the speech itself. It was worthy of the occasion. He intervened at a time when the House was agitated. There had been sharp, acrimonious exchanges across the floor between opposing sides. One side had been taunting the Prime Minister ; the other side had vigorously resented the speech of Sir John Simon and had been thrilled by the speech of their Leader.

The rising of the venerable statesman stilled the tumult, as the sudden appearance of the master quiets the noisy clamour of the class-room. Members forgot for a time their resentment and settled down to listen and enjoy. It was a virile and entertaining speech, full of genial raillery and humorous banter. It was startling in its detachment, and it turned the minds of all from the main controversy, to be stirred with delight by a display of elegant diction, literary felicity, pungent epigram and Attic wit. There were shouts of laughter, as he gaily twitted the Prime Minister with his haste in delivering the funeral oration before the doctor had pronounced life extinct. Delicately he rallied the Prime Minister at his bitter scoffs at the Liberal amendment. Why this sacrosanct supersensitiveness ? He claimed that the action of the Liberals in calling for a Select Committee was according to precedent, as in the case of the Jameson Raid and of the Marconi question. Nobody had then whimpered about the torture chamber. Mr. Asquith appeared to give an opening for accommodation when he made the offer to the Government that the Liberals would not ask for places on the Select Committee. There could then be no suggestion of a packed jury. If the audience had known that this was the final appearance of ' the Last of the Romans ' in that famous Forum, they could not have listened with more attention and deference. If the orator had known, he could not have wished to pass from the scene where he had played so great a part in a better

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rôle than that of peacemaker, seeking reconciliation and the moderation of contending passions.

The concluding contribution to the debate was both climax and anti-climax. The House had reached a fever heat of expectancy when Mr. Thomas stepped to his place, smiling, confident, 'cocky.' It was evident at once from the provocative preface that the battle was to be joined, and his speech was to be the first of the Election Campaign. He spoke with withering contempt of the mean manœuvre by which the Conservatives were deserting their own motion and joining with the Liberals. The Conservatives, he declared, were afraid to trust the Liberals to support their motion of censure ; so they had decided to take no chances, but to vote for the Liberal amendment.

When the vote was taken, 364 supported the Liberal amendment, while 198 supported the Government.

The fall of the first Labour Government must always remain a mystery. There had been some intrigue between Mr. Lloyd George and certain Members of the Conservative Party, Mr. Austen Chamberlain, Lord Birkenhead, and Sir Samuel Hoare, for the purposes of overthrowing the Labour Government. It was arranged between them that the Tories should desert their own motion of censure and support the Liberal amendment. This inevitably meant sentence of death on the Labour Government.

There is no doubt that the Liberals who acknowledged the leadership of Mr. Asquith were not anxious to defeat the Government. All the evening they were undecided. It is well known that Mr. Asquith was willing to withdraw the Liberal amendment if the Government would give them a face-saving compromise—something, anything, to save them from the irritation of surrender. It is strange that the Prime Minister did not take him at his word. Certainly no one in the Labour Party wanted an Election at that time, and there is no doubt that it could easily have been avoided.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### *THE RED LETTER*

**A**lthough the Annual Conference of the Labour Party had dissolved amid scenes of tremendous enthusiasm and the rank and file had gone forward to the General Election campaign filled with high hopes of a sweeping victory, their sanguine expectations awoke no responsive echo in the heart of the one man who was to be the principal actor in the electoral drama. MacDonald was nervous and excited. The imminence of a General Election had always a tremendous psychological effect upon him. The fear complex that haunted him was stirred to a morbid activity at that time. He became scared, rattled. Even when his success was assured, when, for example, as in this instance, he was fighting a safe seat like Aberavon, he became again and again, during the campaign, the victim of a panic fear.

The debate on the Campbell case in the House of Commons had not only led to the defeat of the Labour Government, but had completely discredited MacDonald in the eyes of the House. Even among the Labour Members there was a disquieting feeling that the debate was not convincing. True, Sir Patrick Hastings, had covered himself with glory in their eyes, but MacDonald had been lame, hesitating, and shifty. The feeling of suspicion which the Prime Minister's demeanour had undoubtedly raised was not confined to his political opponents. Indeed, the more advanced of his supporters were not worried because MacDonald had interfered with a legal action; they feared that he had not.

How desperately anxious MacDonald was to win the election was shown by the very strenuous part he personally took in it. He carefully arranged a great electioneering campaign. He travelled here, there, and everywhere, delivering speeches in halls, railway stations, and even in the open air, although he hated it.

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I travelled with him from London to Glasgow. It was a triumphal tour on the modern American campaigning model. Word had been passed on ahead of his coming, and there were crowds to meet him wherever the train stopped. At Rugby, Crewe, Carlisle, and other stations, he made little speeches. It is evidence of his great facility in public speaking that, although he had to make these very short speeches, and although the difficulty of these speeches, as every speaker knows, is in inverse proportion to their length, not once did he repeat himself.

The climax of the tour was to be at Glasgow. That MacDonald was nervous about his Glasgow speech was shown by an incident on the way there. He had often spoken in Glasgow before, during, and since the War. He knew that politically it was a 'key' town. It was the centre of the Independent Labour Party and of what might be called the Left wing of the Labour Party. It was the home-town of such well-known political personalities as Wheatley, Maxton, Kirkwood, Buchanan, Hardie, and Stewart. The character of the audience, too, gave him some cause for worry. He knew that it would be a tremendously large audience, perhaps the largest he had ever addressed outside London, alert, intelligent, critical, and controversial. And Scotland is the home of 'heckling.'

Shortly before entering Glasgow, the train stopped at Motherwell, and into the Prime Minister's compartment stepped Mr. James Walker, a well-known Trade Union official, who was also a Glasgow magistrate, and who has since become a Member of Parliament. "Look here, Walker," he said after a few moments, "what kind of speech do you think I should make in Glasgow?" This question, quite unusual in MacDonald's case, showed his anxiety and nervousness about the forthcoming meeting.

Now, Mr. Walker knew the Prime Minister well. He knew that the criticism in Glasgow and, indeed, in Scotland was that he had the reputation of a mere reformist. He knew the constant attacks made upon MacDonald and his Government for not being much more socialist in their policy. There is no doubt that Walker had estimated the position accurately as far as the importance of the occasion, the character of the

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audience, and the message was concerned. "My advice to you," said Walker, "is to go all out for Socialism. Give them it hot and strong. Be as Red as you like. That's what they want in Glasgow."

There was one thing for which Walker had not made due allowance, and that was the personal factor. MacDonald was quite unable, physically, morally, or politically, to give the address that his adviser suggested. He was physically tired, after a long and strenuous journey; he did not believe in the hot and strong gospel associated with Glasgow, and he feared the political effect of such a speech. In fact, to go "all out for Socialism" would be to run contrary to his own instincts and his planned policy in the election campaign. His whole object had been to build up a reputation for sanity and moderation and a complete repudiation of extremism. Glasgow, he recalled, however, is unique. He had found that, during the War, he could say things in Glasgow that he could say nowhere else. He was impressed with Walker's advice and really tried to act upon it, with as much discretion and restraint as the circumstances permitted.

The meeting, as far as size and enthusiasm were concerned, was one of the greatest that MacDonald had ever addressed. Always acutely sensitive of a great audience, MacDonald responded to the mood of the moment. His nervousness and his anxiety led him beyond the limits to which his saner judgments would have confined him, and the result was disappointing. This was the first occasion on which MacDonald had broadcast from a public meeting, and hundreds of thousands all over the country had tuned in to listen. Owing to MacDonald's ignorance of the use of the microphone, he at times omitted to stand in front of the instrument. When a whispered intimation was made to him that it was 'going over' badly, he sought to correct this by shouting. The result was that he was either inarticulate or inaudible. It is interesting to note in passing that MacDonald, after this disastrous experience, recognizing the great place that broadcasting was bound to play in political propaganda, set himself to master the art with such good results that he became one of the foremost public speakers 'on the air.'

In strong contrast with this was the speech delivered in

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the same election by Mr. Stanley Baldwin, who read his speech from a careful typescript in the seclusion and quiet of a private room. MacDonald delivered an extempore address on the platform, in all the excitement of a great gathering. This may have been the first, but it certainly was not the last, occasion on which the simple-minded Mr. Stanley Baldwin 'put it over' on MacDonald.

The speech, however, was a failure only to the absent listeners. To the audience in front, thrilled by the telepathic reactions of a great concourse, the speech was an oratorical triumph. It was heard with that rapt, silent attention that is characteristic of Scots audiences, but the peroration raised it to a white heat of rapturous enthusiasm.

Although the Labour Party were anxious to choose their own ground in the fight, they were unable to do so, and had to accept the issue laid down by their Conservative opponents. The election, therefore, was fought on the Russian Treaty and particularly on the proposed loan to Russia. As far as the Prime Minister was concerned, this issue was preferable to any other. He believed that his record on the Labour Government's relations with the Soviet Republic and with Communism could be adequately defended. His opponents knew quite well that MacDonald was as bitter an opponent of Communism as they were themselves, and the attack on him was practically confined to his relations with the Soviet Republic. The campaign against him was mainly inspired by the fear that he might yield to the Left wing of his Party and commit the Government of the country to a Socialist policy. It was not the strength of his enthusiasm for an ideal that was so much feared as the weakness and uncertainty of it. It was known that there was a strong element in the Labour Party that was anxious to strengthen and develop friendly relations with the hated Bolsheviks. The Conservatives and many of the Liberals were united against that policy. The issue was also ideal for the Tory Party. It gave ample opportunity for flag-wagging. Here was this Labour Government conspiring with foreigners, and Communists at that, to hand over good British money to a gang of bloodthirsty revolutionaries—to 'shake hands with murder,' as Mr. Churchill picturesquely put it. The thing was intolerable, and the Election was being

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fought with a keenness and bitterness unheard of for twenty years. Every constituency was flooded with leaflets denouncing the Labour Government and the Soviet Republic. The hoardings were plastered with great posters picturing horrible creatures in Russian costumes.

A particularly vicious cartoon was featured in *Punch* on the eve of the poll. It was entitled 'On the Loan Trail,' and depicted a Russian sandwich-man walking in the gutter in Whitehall. He wore the Russian skipped cap and high boots. His hair was long and unkempt, as was his straggling beard. He was slouching along with boards in front and behind, his left hand in his trouser pocket, and carrying a small red flag in his right. The board had these words: '*Vote for MacDonald and Me.*' The *Me*, emphasized in block letters, referred to this loathsome monster. The cartoon was intended to scare the timid elector with the menace of Russia and no doubt was very effective. The coupling of *MacDonald and Me* was clever and had evidently been conceived by one who knew the psychological reactions of the association of ideas. MacDonald appreciated the force of this strategy and was eager to circumvent it. He realized that he must dissociate himself absolutely from any suspicion of sympathy with the Soviet Republic. After the defeat on the Campbell case, he was all the more anxious to rebut the malicious calumny that constantly associated his name with Communism.

It was at this moment that the famous Red Letter came into his hands. The tale as he told it himself had some picturesque features. One of the accusations against him is that he held up the letter for days and even weeks and only published it when he knew that, if he did not, others would. He describes the occasion, therefore, with some detail. The day was far spent when he arrived at the place which was to be his lodging for the night. He had had a very tiring day, and it was just after midnight when he retired to his room. He, however, determined to dispose of his mail before he went to bed. Among the dispatch boxes which had been sent from London was one which bore the inscription *The Foreign Office*. On opening it, he found the document which has since become notorious as the *Red Letter*. He makes a point that the Foreign Office had not called attention specially to



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this particular enclosure. 'Among the business,' he says, 'without any distinction, among the ordinary business, I discovered this letter on the 15th, either that night before 12 o'clock or next morning after midnight. I dealt with it without any prevarication or without any delay.'

It purported to be a letter from the 'Executive Committee of the Third International (Communist)' and addressed from the *Presidium, Moscow* to the Central Committee of the British Communist Party. It incited the British Communist Party to conspiracy, armed insurrection, and civil war. It refers specifically to the great issue of the hour, the Russian Treaties, which were at that moment awaiting ratification by the British Parliament. It declared that :

'The time is approaching for the Parliament of England to consider the Treaty concluded between the Governments of Great Britain and the S.S.S.R. for the purpose of ratification. The fierce campaign raised by the British bourgeoisie around the question shows that the majority of the same, together with reactionary circles, are against the Treaty for the purpose of breaking off an agreement consolidating the ties between the proletariats of the two countries, leading to the restoration of normal relations between England and the S.S.S.R.'

The letter was signed by the President of the Presidium of the IKKI, *Zinoviev*, and countersigned by McManus. The letter was subsequently found to be a patchwork of extracts from speeches and pamphlets, a hotch-potch of Communist sentiments put together very crudely and obviously the work of a White Russian organization. Its purpose was to stir suspicion against the Labour Party. It seems difficult to believe that any intelligent person in this country could read this childishly naïve statement without recognizing at once that it was a forgery and a very stupid one at that. It was obviously a joint product and bore on the face of it indications which proved its fabrication. No one saw the original letter. The *Daily Mail* had several copies. The first version of the letter, hawked around Fleet Street, contained the signature McManus. It is a small point, but not even a Communist signs his surname only to a document. When it was found

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that McManus was in England and not in Moscow, the name was omitted from the later versions. 'There had been enough 'red letters' fluttering around Whitehall for years to paper the walls of the Foreign Office. The Secret Service were continually bringing in documents of this kind. There was, in fact, a bureau established in Riga and supported by the White Russians, which turned out this sort of thing regularly. The Home Office, Scotland Yard, and the Admiralty had on one occasion been discovered actually assisting in the production and distribution of faked copies of the Soviet Newspaper *Pravda*. Mr. Shortt, the then Home Secretary, had the humiliating experience of having to stand up and confess to an amazed House of Commons that his Department had been an accessory in this fraud.

The Zinoviev letter was, indeed, the poorest specimen that had ever appeared in Fleet Street or Whitehall. Mr. J. D. Gregory, C.B., C.M.G., Head of the Northern (Russian) Department of the Foreign Office during this period, says :

'Why this particular rag should have been considered such a singularly tasty morsel, I have never been able to explain to myself. People could at any time have had a whole meal off Zinoviev letters if they had wished. But the October 1924 brand seems to have been a real delicacy ; and it has been responsible for a vast amount of indigestion.'<sup>1</sup>

What puzzled Mr. Gregory was why 'this particular rag' should have gained such an importance. Its significance was in the peculiar circumstances of its appearance. This document had been in the hands of Sir Eyre Crowe, Permanent Secretary to the Foreign office, for weeks. No doubt, anti-Communist as he was, he saw its possibilities. It is probable that, when he learned that the *Daily Mail* intended to publish it, he sent it on to the Prime Minister with such comment as he deemed advisable. To understand and appreciate the action that Mr. MacDonald took, the whole circumstances must be taken into account.

Sir Eyre Crowe, as official head, and MacDonald, as political head, had evidently a common policy on Russia and were working in the closest collusion. Neither Sir Eyre Crowe's

<sup>1</sup> *On the Edge of Diplomacy*, p. 216.

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anti-Communist policy nor MacDonald's sympathy with it was known to the Labour Party at the time. The reverential awe with which MacDonald regarded Sir Eyre Crowe would lead him to treat any communication from him with special attention. Years later, in the House of Commons, when defending his action with regard to this document, MacDonald declared that there was no covering letter sent by the Permanent Secretary; as by that time, however, Sir Eyre Crowe was dead, it was impossible to verify the accuracy of such a statement.

Why was this letter sent to MacDonald? MacDonald knew that Ponsonby was at the Foreign Office and actually in Downing Street at the time, and Ponsonby had charge of the Russian Treaty negotiations. Lord Haldane, too, was available, and he was acting as Deputy Prime Minister in MacDonald's absence. Why had Sir Eyre Crowe taken the extraordinary course of sending the letter to MacDonald without a word of explanation - not even a note to say that he must deal with it, as neither Ponsonby nor Haldane had been consulted.

Sir Eyre Crowe knew that the main attack on MacDonald was on this issue. He had seen the abuse of his Chief in the Press, day by day, wax more intense. Although MacDonald had done his utmost to show that he had no sympathy with Communism here or in Russia, his enemies refused to accept his most vehement protestations. Every attempt to dissociate himself from Russia had only been followed by a more violent campaign of vilification. Something had to be done to counteract that attack. For this purpose, the letter, if properly used, instead of being a weapon against him, could serve to vindicate MacDonald and silence his enemies. If he accepted it as genuine and administered a stern rebuke to Russia, it would be a clear indication of his patriotic attitude. Then, not even the *Daily Mail* could doubt his anti-Bolshevik ardour.

With this plan, the authenticity of the letter was a matter of little moment. The Foreign Office could have got into touch with Rakowsky, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires, and found out the facts about the document if they had wished. MacDonald made no great effort at the time or later to verify its genuineness. Whether the letter was genuine or not, the attempt would be made to use it to discredit the Labour Government

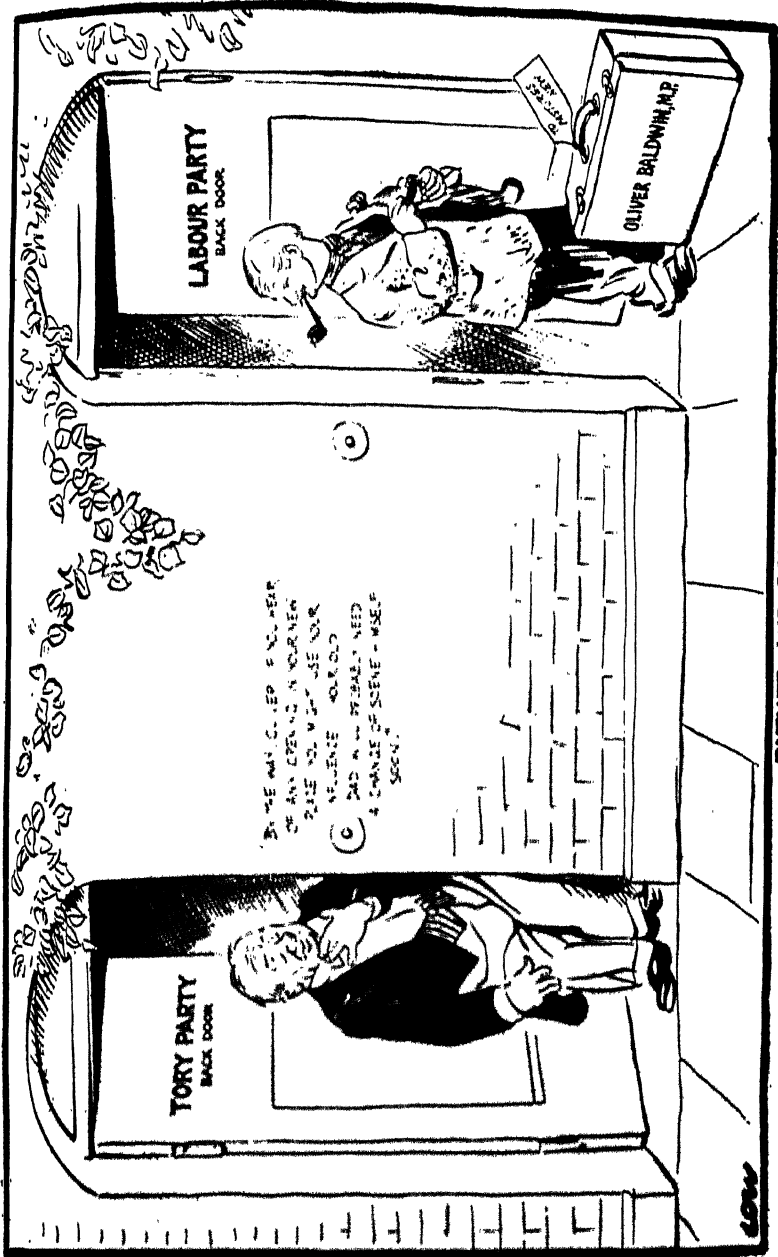
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and MacDonald as Prime Minister. Publication of the letter would be a brilliant piece of electioneering strategy. Nothing sways the British public like a call to patriotism. MacDonald had had bitter experience of the effectiveness of beating the patriotic drum, when he was thrown out at the 1918 election from Leicester, which he had represented for over twelve years. And there was a slogan for the flag-wagging stunt ready to hand : *Hands Off Britain*.

What then was the criterion on which MacDonald was to decide how to deal with the letter that lay before him? It was to find out how the result of any decision would affect his own position and prospects. One of the best known and most deplored of his characteristics was his hesitation, his vacillation. He had a weird Celtic premonition of danger. There was danger here—two dangers. There was danger from the Right and danger from the Left. He estimated the dangers as unequal. The intense propaganda against him made him judge the danger from his political opponents as more formidable than the resentment of his political friends. Moreover, it was more immediate. If he conciliated his enemies by prompt action, he would have time after the election to explain to the Labour Party why he had taken the course he did. If his strategy was successful, there would be no need for explanation. The hosannas that accompanied his triumphal car to Westminster would drown the critics' querulous squeaks. If he failed, why, he knew the Labour Party, their generosity, their loyalty, and their self-sacrifice. He knew that they would attribute the highest motives to whichever course he chose. Their disillusionment had not then begun.

After much hesitation and not without some misgiving, he took the decision to accept the letter as genuine, and wrote a letter which was really an attack on the Russian Government.

The effect of the publication by the Foreign Office of the Zinoviev letter and MacDonald's note of protest was a tremendous blow to the Labour Party. Coming as it did, just at the psychological moment, it did the maximum amount of damage. MacDonald, for several critical days, kept the Party completely in the dark as to why he had put this weapon in the hands of his opponents. The election was being fought on the Russian Loan, and the Labour Prime Minister was



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accepting as genuine a letter from Russia which was an attempt to stir up revolution in this country.

In this mystery of the Red Letter there was a curious circumstance that only came out four years afterwards, when MacDonal'd moved a motion in the House of Commons for a full inquiry into the matter. On that occasion, a statement was made by Mr. J. H. Thomas that MacDonal'd had never initialled the draft letter of protest to Russia. After the publication of the documents on the Saturday before the election, MacDonal'd telegraphed the Foreign Office to ask why the British Note was published, and got the reply : ' You initialled it.' ' He knew,' said Mr. Thomas, ' he had not, and he had to face that audience and the country saying to himself : " I am told I did something ; but, if I dare act, I shall throw the Civil Service over." ' There was no doubt that the letter of protest was authoritative. MacDonal'd made many corrections and amendments on it in his small, neat, unmistakable calligraphy, and several of the words and phrases were characteristically MacDonal'd's. The excuse that he did not initial the document is a mere quibble.

This new defence was in reality an accusation of sharp practice against the officials of the Foreign Office. Nobody believed it, especially as there was by this time no one to confute it.

The truth seems to be that MacDonal'd sought to use the Red Letter, which he knew to be worthless, to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the Tories, after his blunder in the Campbell case. His desire to be the stern Cato who would stand no nonsense, lost the Labour Party the election.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### *THE GENERAL STRIKE*

What has come to be called the General Strike was undoubtedly one of the most momentous and epoch-making incidents in our history. It was not really a general strike, either in its purpose or in its extent. The General Strike as a theory of the Syndicalists aimed at the institution of the Socialist State by means of the complete cessation of all work. It was a method by which a revolution was to be brought about by the withdrawal of labour. The strike of 1926 had no such purpose, nor could the stoppage of 1926 be called general, as it did not include such vital services as the Post Office, the telegraphs, telephones, and wireless. To a great extent, moreover, the supplies of light and power were not stopped. It was a demonstration of sympathy, and its object was to bring pressure to bear on the Government to do justice to that most deserving body of workers, the miners.

To get a proper perspective of this unique event in British industrial history, and estimate the part that MacDonald played in it, it is necessary to recall the facts that led up to it. Conditions in the coal-mining industry had been going from bad to worse for years. There was wide-spread starvation. The men were getting enraged as they saw their wives and children driven steadily down towards destitution. Their case was taken up in the House of Commons. In March 1925 MacDonald said :

‘Black clouds hang over the coal-fields. Will the employers meet the miners, so that the miners and their wives and families do not pay the price of peace by starvation? . . . There is talk about the miners, railwaymen, and the enginners coming to an arrangement. No greater calamity could come over the country than that there should be raised a great block of Unions on the one side and Capital

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on the other, engaged in a suicidal fight in industry. . . .  
The miners are only claiming decent human conditions.'

But the Government paid no heed. Members sat listless and uninterested.

The lock-out notices, which had been issued by the mine-owners a month before, expired. The terms put forward by the mine-owners for a revised agreement proposed drastic reductions in wages, abolition of the principle of the minimum wage and national agreements. The miners rejected these proposals and agreed to place their case unreservedly in the hands of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. The General Council endorsed the decision of the Miners' Federation not to meet the owners until the proposals had been withdrawn. Events moved quickly after that. The railway and transport unions agreed 'not to handle coal if the lock-out took place.' Mr. Baldwin declared definitely that there could be no subsidy. The International Miners' and Transport Workers' Federation decided on an embargo on coal in the event of a stoppage in Britain. The Court of Inquiry set up by the Government strongly criticized the mine-owners.

A special Conference of Trade Union Executives empowered the General Council to issue strike orders. That same night, instructions counter-signed by the officials of the railway and transport unions, went out to all parts of the country stopping all movement of coal after midnight on Friday, 31 July.

Next day Mr. Baldwin climbed down and announced that the Government was willing to grant a subsidy for nine months, during which time a Royal Commission would hold a full inquiry; the owners meantime withdrawing the lock-out notices. This was the forerunner of the General Strike nine months later. What was behind this surrender of Mr. Baldwin? The fact that the Government was not ready to fight and the fact that there were no large stocks of coal in reserve for a long struggle. But it was no real surrender; it was a truce for nine months. The Government and the coal-owners immediately began to prepare for war.

When everything was ready, the coal-owners struck. Lock-out notices were posted on every pit on 16 April 1926 to



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expire fourteen days later. The owners refused to discuss the terms embodied in the notices. On 29 April, the day before the lock-out notices expired, a Special Conference of Trade Union Executives met in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, to determine a course of action. At that meeting Mr. J. H. Thomas, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen moved, and Mr. Bevan, Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, seconded a resolution in favour of continuing negotiations 'provided that the impending lock-out of the mine-workers is not enforced.' At midday next day, when already some thousands of men had been locked out, the owners, through the Prime Minister, offered terms consisting of an all-round reduction of  $13\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on standard wages and a reversion to the eight-hour day for at least three and a half years.

Day and night the negotiating committee of the T.U.C. pleaded with the Government to obtain a withdrawal of the lock-out notices. Shortly before midnight on Friday, the Members of the Committee returned and reported that they had failed. 'The lock-out had begun. "In all my long experience," said Mr. Thomas, "and I have conducted many negotiations, I never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day to-day. But we failed. We have striven; we have pleaded; we have begged for peace, because we want peace. The nation wants peace. Those who want war must take the responsibility." Next morning (Saturday May 1st), the Conference reassembled for its most critical session. Then the Trade Union Congress moved proposals for co-ordinated action involving the calling out of certain specified unions at midnight on May 3rd. The vote was taken by reading a roll of the affiliated unions, the representative of each answering 'Yes' or 'No' to the call. The Strike was approved by 3,653,529 votes to 49,911.

It was just at this peak moment of the Conference, when the tremendous excitement that followed the taking of that momentous decision was at its height, that MacDonald was called upon to address the meeting. As he rose, the audience rose with him and gave him a reception fit for a king. Many of those around him on the platform, leaders of the great unions, had criticized MacDonald in the past. With several

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he was hardly on speaking terms, but all that was forgotten. Here was the great and famous leader, the ex-Premier, throwing in his lot with the Trade Union millions, prepared to lead the organized workers in a general strike.

The orator was worthy of the occasion. The audience was just in the psychological condition to react to emotional suggestion. He turned every circumstance to his advantage ; he exploited every artifice of his art. The task was easy to one of MacDonald's remarkable oratorical gifts. His great voice filled the building, as he spoke in deep tones of impressive solemnity. The speech should be studied with great care, because of the astonishing impression it had on the audience. It is as remarkable for what is left unsaid as for what is said.

'My friends and colleagues,' he began, 'you can go away home this afternoon fully convinced that, if the sword has been drawn, your representatives stood the last two days with their hands on the hilt of that sword, doing their best to prevent somebody else drawing that sword. When it was drawn, towards midnight last night, it was not the hand of Thomas, nor the hand of Herbert Smith, not the hand of any miner, not the hand of any man belonging to the General Council or to the Industrial Committee, it was the hand of the present Government that drew that sword and is now flaunting it in the face of the public of Great Britain. How did the negotiations break down ? Not because the men refused to negotiate, but Herbert Smith was asked : 'Will you, before a word of negotiation has been uttered, before you meet the other side, will you agree to a reduction of wages ?' What reply was the only reply that anybody, employer or workman, would think of giving to such a question as that ?

'A negative agreement comes after negotiation and not before. I am still old-fashioned enough to believe in public opinion. I believe in the fair-mindedness of British public opinion, and I cannot help thinking, although the sands have almost emptied in the glass—at twenty minutes past two on Saturday ; the miners locked out—that there are men belonging to the Government who are ashamed of last night.'

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He continued :

‘There are millions of men, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, who hold with me the same traditions of Britain—Scotsmen, Englishmen, Welshmen—who will say that this fight is a wicked fight, an unnecessary fight, a criminal fight, and will say to this Government : “In God’s name put no more silly or improper questions. Trust the word of an honourable man, Herbert Smith. Trust the power of intelligent men like those who are sitting here on both sides of me—the General Council and the Industrial Committee—go on conducting negotiations and end the dispute.”’

‘On Monday,’ he continued, ‘we will raise this in the House of Commons. We will stand our corner ; don’t make any mistake about it. We will, perhaps, not be dancing about, but we will be by the miners’ side, because it is a just side, an honourable side. It is the life of the toiling masses that we have been striving for, not to make enemies of society, but to make the very best friends that society has—the miner, the engineer, the worker in the field, all toiling, toiling, all honest men, able men, skilled men, contributing to the commonwealth, so that they themselves might live honourable and magnificent individual lives. That is our ideal. It is in that spirit, in that firmness of purpose—purpose you want, not words—we will stand by you. If you want us to help you in this way, we will do it.”’

There was no doubt as to how the meeting took MacDonald’s inspiring appeal. It was taken as a call to battle and thrilled all who heard it to ecstatic enthusiasm. This was no ordinary meeting. It consisted of picked men and women, the leaders of unions. MacDonald, speaking with all his authority, personal and as Leader of the Party, had not only approved their decision for a general strike, but took his place by their side in the fight. Hypnotized by the spell of the orator, there was not one in the audience who did not visualize MacDonald leading, sword in hand, the serried ranks of labour and calling the army of the workers to battle.

It was not known to his audience that almost alone of all that great gathering, he was absolutely opposed, not only to the purpose of the conference, but to the decision that had

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just been taken with such clamorous enthusiasm. There seemed to be no one there, who by any form of suggestive intuition or telepathic insight, was warned that they were all being misled, that the speaker was not doing what they thought he was doing. Not until afterwards did any of them realize that they had been imposed upon, and some have not yet appreciated the method or measure of the imposture.

This was exactly the method that MacDonald used so often during the War, and by means of which he built up a great reputation as one who stood up boldly and courageously for the extreme pacifist position of the Independent Labour Party. When a militarist clergyman in Leicester, in 1916, challenged MacDonald on his attitude to the War, he was able to retort that not a single sentence of his could be cited that could even remotely bear the interpretation that his reverend critic put upon it. The clergyman was confounded, for MacDonald's speeches were so carefully ambiguous and so studiously evasive that they brought no satisfaction to the heresy hunter.

So with this General Strike speech. MacDonald's speech was expected to inspire his hearers in support of a motion calling for a sympathetic strike ; yet neither at that conference nor afterwards in the House of Commons did he say one word in favour of such a strike.

The speech of MacDonald was a psychological as well as an oratorical phenomenon. Public speaking is for the purpose of persuasion. Oratory's object is inspiration. Both these purposes were achieved by MacDonald's speech. But it used to be thought that an audience could only be persuaded or inspired if the speaker were sincere and really believed in his message. The astounding thing about MacDonald's speech at this conference was that unless he was talking with his tongue in his cheek, he must have been carried away by the mood of the moment and his audience—an audience of unusual intelligence—was completely misled.

If MacDonald was opposed to the strike, why did he attend the meeting ? The answer is that he could not do otherwise. The entire Labour Movement had gone over to the side of the miners. Mr. Thomas was also opposed to the strike, but the National Union of Railwaymen wholeheartedly

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approved it. If Thomas wished to retain his position, he had to acquiesce in their policy. If he had not done so, his dismissal from the post of General Secretary would have come in 1926 as surely as it did five years later when he joined the National Government.

When the House of Commons met on 3 May 1926, the Prime Minister (Mr. Baldwin) told an assembly of excited Members that the House was meeting on one of the gravest occasions on which it had ever met. He proceeded to give a very fair account of the events that had led up to the strike. His speech increased in emphasis as he proceeded. Just before he rose to a peroration of lofty eloquence, he turned aside to attack MacDonald. 'Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?' Mr. Baldwin did not quote Molière, but that was his meaning. What was MacDonald doing in that galley? Had the Leader of the Opposition not condemned this very method of industrial warfare?

'It is only two years ago,' he said, 'that I remember very well reading in the *New Leader* some observations by the Leader of the Labour Party. He had said: "All my life, I have been opposed to the sympathetic strike. It has no practical value; it has one certain result—a bitter and blinding reaction. Liberty is far more easily destroyed by those who abuse it than by those who oppose it."'

To this MacDonald replied:

'If I have a grievance against the Prime Minister for having read out a statement of mine, it is that he selected a very poor condemnation. I have gone far more into detail than that. With the discussion of general strikes and Bolshevism and all that kind of thing, I have nothing to do at all.'

Next day Sir William Joynson Hicks, the Home Secretary supplied the gap left by the Prime Minister. He said that the Leader of the Opposition in a book written in 1912 had denounced the General Strike. He had written:

'The General Strike is not a weapon of reform, a means of raising wages, or of improving conditions, like the ordinary strike, such as we know it. It is "purely speculative, and is

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dominated by the ideas of revolution.” The General Strike works in a totally different way from ordinary strikes. It empties markets ; it raises prices ; it stifles consumption throughout the whole community. What does that mean ? It hits the poor people heaviest, the middle classes next, and the rich least of all.’

Everyone who knew MacDonald knew that these had been his opinions on the sympathetic strike. Indeed, it was that fact that made his appearance on the conference platform the more welcome. A man who had opposed strikes was there supporting a resolution in favour of the biggest strike in British history. It looked like a dramatic renunciation.

In *Answers* of 22 and 29 May 1926, MacDonald wrote a powerful denunciation of the General Strike.

‘The country will not have it,’ he wrote. ‘If the General Strike is the only grand manifestation of Trade Union power, God help Trade Unionism and God help the workers who trust to it for a redress of their own grievances.’

A few days after the Strike had been called off, MacDonald wrote as follows in the *Socialist Review* :

‘The General Strike is a weapon that cannot be wielded for industrial purposes. It is clumsy and ineffectual. It has no goal which, when reached, can be regarded as victory. So to-day some critics who have responsibility for nothing blame the General Council ; some blame the miners. The real blame is with the General Strike itself and those who preached it without considering it and induced the workers to blunder into it.’

MacDonald was not a member of the negotiating Committee between the Government and the T.U.C. Indeed, Thomas, defending MacDonald’s non-intervention, said : ‘MacDonald was asked by the miners to keep clear of it. They did not want him.’ He had, however, kept in close touch with all concerned.

On the Monday evening, just before the zero hour of the strike, MacDonald, with Arthur Henderson and the full General Council of the T.U.C., went to meet the Premier at

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Downing Street. After some discussion, Lord Birkenhead drew up a revised formula. Of this formula, Mr. Thomas said: 'Never mind what the miners or anyone else says; I, speaking for the T.U.C., accept it.'

Baldwin reported the settlement to the Cabinet. This meant defeat for those Ministers who did not want peace, who were out for war. 'The revolution stunt of Mr. Churchill was about to fail.' 'The Government pretended,' says MacDonald, 'that they were facing a constitutional conspiracy. Mr. Churchill probably thought so. If he cannot get a revolution, he is ready to make one. On Monday night he was already intoxicated with the prospect of a new Sidney Street escapade.'

It was just at this moment that word was brought to the Cabinet that the machine men of the *Daily Mail* had refused to print the paper because it contained an article which implied that, while all who opposed the strike were 'for King and Country,' the Trade Unionists were unpatriotic and disloyal. Then, with characteristic astuteness, Baldwin allowed Churchill to take command. Churchill said that it must now be war. He and Birkenhead drew up an ultimatum to be given to the T.U.C. Committee, by Mr. Baldwin. The Committee was in conference with the miners' leaders when at midnight a peremptory message was sent by Baldwin to Mr. Thomas.

What happened next can best be told in the words of MacDonald himself in the House of Commons.

'Mr. Baldwin knew the mind of the representatives of the General Council. That is the first fact. He also knew that, at that moment, the General Council, having specially summoned the Miners' Executive, were in consultation with the Miners' Executive in a room practically next door to the room where the Cabinet was sitting. That is the second fact. Then the news of the *Daily Mail* incident appeared. There was never a question put to the people in the other room: "Do you know anything about this?" "Are you responsible for this?" "What action do you propose to take in regard to it?" There was no approach made of one kind or another. But when they were busy working out this formula, which was the form of a substance, a letter

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was received which says : " The whole thing is finished." After the consternation on the receipt of this letter was over, my colleagues decided to send a deputation to the room next door where the Government representatives were sitting, asking really what this was all about and to explain the whole situation to them. When the deputation arrived at that room, they found the room locked and the whole place in darkness.'

As he left Downing Street, Thomas told the waiting pressmen that the Government had declared war.

Whether a general strike is justified on legal, political, moral, or economic grounds is a question for the jurist, the politician, the moralist, and the economist respectively. Certainly the sympathetic strike of 1926 was no criterion. It lacked the essentials of success. There was no unity at headquarters. It ended abruptly in a disagreeable squabble between the Miners' Federation and the T.U.C. It was led by men who did not believe in it. Thomas admitted that his object was peace at any price and, when the end came, the price was exorbitant. Thomas, the head of the industrial side, and MacDonald, as head of the political side, joined in the effort to bring the strike to an end. It was impossible for such a tremendous instrument to succeed when it was controlled by men who did not believe in its efficiency.

The response to the strike call had been miraculous, the discipline had been marvellous, and the decision to end it was keenly resented. There was talk of treachery and betrayal. The masses have, however, proverbially short memories ; the double dealing of MacDonald was forgotten, and the miners of Seaham returned him to Parliament in 1929 with a record majority.

Baldwin was undoubtedly the dominant figure in the General Strike. It was his dramatic intervention exemplifying his skill both as a felicitous spellbinder and successful strategist, that won the victory for the coal-owners and struck the trade unions a blow from which they have never recovered. Baldwin has had long connection with trade unions. In his maiden speech in the House of Commons he spoke of the happy relations between his firm and the trade unions. Then with



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an inconsistency which has been characteristic, he proceeded to denounce the resolution before the House—and a Government resolution at that—which proposed an eight hours' day for miners.

The next landmark in his political evolution was when Mr. MacQuisten brought in his Trade Union Bill in 1925. This was an attack on the trade unions and was meant to strike a fatal blow at the Labour Party's finances. At first sight it would seem strange that Baldwin should oppose a Bill to which his Party was pledged. The answer is easy. The Bill was premature. When the Government declared war on the trade unions and the Labour Party they would choose their own time and that time was not yet. It was in connection with this Bill that Baldwin made, what has been judged one of the most memorable speeches of his life: the famous Peace-in-our-time oration. It was an eloquent plea for reconciliation, a kindly brotherly feeling, between master and man such as used to be in the old family business of Baldwin's. He described, with diffident apologies for the personal reference, the industrial Arcadia with which he had been actively associated for twenty years 'with never a shadow of a dispute with any of my own men.' It was a benevolent little Bethel where no one 'got the sack,' where there was no hurry and no hustle and 'where a large number of old gentlemen used to spend their time sitting on the handles of wheelbarrows smoking their pipes.' It was a touching little hummelstory which lost nothing in the telling. Proceeding, he appealed to his Party to use its strength graciously and generously in the interests of peace. This peace can only be obtained by these two bodies of men—the trade unions on the one side and the employers' organizations on the other—'learning to understand each other and not to fight each other—a doctrine of industrial peace and spiritual co-partnership.' So he mounted to his climax:

'We at any rate are not going to fire the first shot. We stand for peace. We stand for the removal of suspicion in the country. We want to create a new atmosphere—we stand for peace—although I know that there are those who work for different ends from most of us in this House, yet there are many in all ranks and all parties who will re-echo my prayer, "Give peace in our time, O Lord."'

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An emotional speech like that could only have one result, and with a lump in their throats if not with tears in their eyes, the Tories consented to the slaughter of their hopeful little Innocent.

Baldwin's next strategic intervention was later in the same year, when the coal-owners served lock-out notices on their men. The mine-owners have always been regarded as the strongest of the employers' organizations, and at the same time the most reactionary employers of labour in the country. Unlike other employers they have never taken kindly to trade unions and their quarrels with their men have been going on for half a century. Yet they have always had a considerable 'pull' with the Government. Several of the leaders of the industry have been also prominent in political organizations. There is no doubt that in the crisis of 1925 the Government was definitely on the side of the owners. They regarded the Mineworkers' Federation as trouble-makers and would be glad of an opportunity to have a slap at them. They believed that all they had to do was to lock the miners out and they would be starved into surrender in a few weeks. What Baldwin came to realize was that this was no ordinary stoppage and the fact that the other unions had placed themselves loyally behind the miners, would produce a situation unprecedented in British history. He foresaw that, with the miners out, no more coal would be produced and that the railwaymen and dockers would prevent a single ton of coal being moved. This meant that no coal being available for works and factories, industry would be brought to a standstill. The signal for all this to happen would be the expiry of the lock-out notices. When he saw this he made a dramatic move. He handed over a subsidy to the mine-owners. To buy off the owners cost the taxpayer £25,000,000. It was perhaps one of the most discreditable transactions on the part of a Government in British political history. The £25,000,000 was to enable the owners to withdraw their lock-out notices and carry on until such time as all was ready to strike the blow.

The famous Peace-in-our-time speech of Baldwin led the trade unions to believe that in their great struggle with the employers, if Baldwin were not friendly, he would at least be neutral. Yet his Government undoubtedly favoured the mine-

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owners throughout. He gave £25,000,000 of the taxpayers' money to help the coal-owners to carry on their conflict with the trade unions. He thereby saved the coal-owners from certain defeat. He mobilized the whole resources of the nation against one section of the community and that the side that had been cruelly wronged. Baldwin's peculiar skill as a strategist, his guileful diplomacy and astute finesse, became once more manifest in the manner of his dealing with the most unprecedented event in British industrial history. It is now known that the aim of the Government was to compel the Trade Unions to call a general strike. They were confident that the strike would now fail because (1) the Government had mobilized and had at their command the entire resources of the nation ; (2) they had laid their plans and made their preparations with care and forethought ; (3) they had the support of a majority of the people. On the other hand the strike was bound to fail because (1) the T.U.C. who were in control had not realized the magnitude of the undertaking ; (2) they had not made any preparation and were caught unawares ; (3) they had no experience of such an adventure ; (4) there was no plan of campaign.

Mr. J. R. Clynes who, as the leader of a great trade union, was anxiously endeavouring to reach a settlement, has said :

‘ Far from encouraging overtures for peace, they first tacitly and then openly inspired preparations for a pitched battle. The more hot-headed of the Tories were going about in great state of jubilation in the autumn of 1925, boasting that a fight was coming which would smash trade union power for ever. They welcomed it, knowing that the casualties in that fight would be drawn from the ranks of starving miners, not from among themselves. In September, eight months before the General Strike, the ‘ Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies ’ opened its offices and began to enrol hundreds of members of what amounted to a sort of unofficial union of strike-breakers. Soon, it had enlisted 100,000 volunteers, who were prepared to undertake blackleg labour, to run trains, lorries, and public services in the event of a great strike on behalf of the miners.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, by The Rt. Hon. J. R. Clynes, P.C., M.P., D.C.L. (p. 73).

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Knowing that the Government were behind them the mine-owners declared that unless the men would accept their terms of longer hours and lower wages on 1 May, when the coal subsidy came to an end, they would lock out a million workers.

Meanwhile the Government knowing that adequate preparations were being made could afford to bide their time.

The T.U.C. only realized when it was too late that they were being led up the garden. The negotiations with the Cabinet were the completest farce. They were not meant to succeed. The Cabinet were not anxious for agreement; they were merely playing for time. Again the T.U.C. were at a disadvantage compared with the Cabinet. They were completely in the dark as to the Government's plans and intentions, whereas the Cabinet knew that the T.U.C. were anxious for peace at almost any price. The Government knew that the T.U.C. were about to accept the Birkenhead formula. They knew that every obstacle to complete agreement had now been removed. Then suddenly the Government struck. They threw over their own proposals for peace and declared war. Thus on the head of the Government lies the responsibility for the so-called General Strike of 1926—the only General Strike this country has ever known.

A few hours after he had declared war on the trade unions and smashed the proposed settlement to atoms, Baldwin said in the House :

‘ Everything that I care for is being smashed to bits at this moment. That does not take away from me either my faith or my courage. Before long the Angel of Peace, with healing in his wings, will be among us again ; and when he comes let us be there to meet him.’

Translated by the Baldwinian code this meant a declaration of war. An angel came all right—and within a year—but it was not the Angel of Peace but Bellona, the goddess of war, and still following the code—it was not the healing balm of happy harmony but the poison bane of bitter contention. In eleven months Baldwin, who had appealed to all to put behind them all vindictiveness and all malice brought in, and by the force of its two hundred Tory majority, drove through the House of Commons the notorious Trade Disputes Bill. It was a Bill

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which even the patient Clynes in a protest of passionate indignation, has described as 'the worst piece of vindictive and spiteful class legislation which our country has ever known.'

It was a Bill which drove the imperturbable Snowden to characterize as 'a deliberate provocation to trade unions, clearly intended to cripple them, a mean, particularly disgraceful measure, with malice in every clause.'

The Prime Minister promised in the House of Commons that there would be no victimization after the General Strike. But his speech of peace was followed by the most ruthless retaliation on the strikers. In the years following the strike there was a most cruel attack by the Means Test and other methods on the standard of life of the poor. There was in these years such poverty and misery in the coal-fields and industrial districts as had not been seen since the 'Hungry Forties.' A new and savage significance was given to the phrase 'Distressed Area.'

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? It is that Earl Baldwin's speeches must all be taken in the Pickwickian sense. If the Trade Union Congress had realized earlier this fact they would have known what value to put on them. If they had been familiar with the Baldwinian technique they would have known that when he talked of peace in industry, he meant war. The peace he meant was the peace of the prostrate pugilist while the referee was counting him out. Yet his speeches have always been successful. Although he has ingenuously endorsed Froude's dictum that 'Oratory is the harlot of the arts,' no speaker of modern times has made such successful use of it. He has been successful in the House of Commons and on the platform and that without any effort on his part to harmonize his perorations with his practice.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### IN OFFICE AGAIN

It was a strange House of Commons that gathered on 2 July 1929 to hear the King's Speech read by the Speaker. The greatest change was in the position of the Conservative Party. In the 1924-29 Parliament, they had occupied all the seats to the right of the Speaker, above and below the passage which is known as the 'Gangway,' and they were so numerous that they overflowed to the benches below the gangway on the Opposition side of the House. To-day, they were so few that they scarcely filled one side. Few in numbers, they were also evidently chastened in spirit. They were disappointed men. Mr. Baldwin had gone to the country on a slogan of 'Safety First.' Whatever safety the result might yield to the country, it had brought not only danger but disaster to the Conservative Party. And there were not wanting those candid critics in the Press and in Parliament who hastened to condemn a Leader whose *laissez-faire* policy has brought such a disappointing result.

The position of the Liberal Party was also unhappy. Although they had returned to the House with a fractional increase in numbers, many of them had only scraped in through Tory support, and others held their seats on a minority vote.

The Labour Members crowded the seats on the Government side, happy, exultant, excited, and making no attempt to conceal their exuberance. On this opening day, each notable, as he appeared, was hailed with a cheer, which was loudest of all when Ramsay MacDonald, the new Prime Minister, made his appearance and edged his way between the Table and the crowded Treasury Bench to the seat of honour opposite the Brass Bound Box.

On this memorable day there was a crowd outside the

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House of Commons as well as within. It has been noticed that, when a Labour Government is in office, the general interest in Parliament is greatly increased. Crowds throng the precincts of the Palace of Westminster, and the demand for tickets for the Members' Gallery is multiplied fourfold. The reason is, of course, that the interest in a Labour Government is more widespread. Politics becomes 'front-page news.'

The time-honoured tradition that the first day of a new Parliament be given up to what are, more or less, ceremonial addresses, was observed on this occasion. When the Government of the day is Tory or Liberal, the rule is that these formal addresses of thanks to His Majesty for His Gracious Speech are moved and seconded by Members arrayed in Court dress or in military or naval uniform. The Labour spokesmen on this occasion dispensed with this formality and delivered their carefully prepared speeches without the decorative sartorial adornment.

This, the second King's Speech for which a Labour Government was responsible, envisaged a long series of legislative proposals relating to agriculture, fishing, marketing of farm and fishery outputs, coal, iron and steel industries, factory legislation, housing and slum clearance, the appointment of a Royal Commission on the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor, a survey of the various National Insurance and Pensions schemes, and the amendment of the Trades Disputes Act. In the field of Foreign Affairs, reference was made to German reparations, the evacuation of the Rhineland, international arbitration, the 'Optional Clause,' and the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Baldwin's speech in reply was of the kind in which he excels. It was of the light, witty, congratulatory, after-dinner variety, with a delicate banter, a gentle, unobtrusive irony, and a whimsical humour. MacDonald, who followed, had a different and a much more difficult task. He had to make the initial speech of a new regime, and it had to be conciliatory to the criticism of his opponents, while being inspiring to his supporters. He appreciated the situation; he explained how his minority position was bound to affect the

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policy of the Government, and he proceeded to make the declaration as to a *Council of State*, which was destined to become of increasing importance and attain a climax of notoriety in the months that lay ahead. In view of the crisis of 1931, these words should be particularly noted :

‘ I want to say something else. It is not because I happen to be at the head of a minority that I say this. The thought must be occurring to the minds of everyone who is aware of the very serious problems that this country has to face, problems at home and problems abroad, I wonder how far it is possible, without in any way abandoning any of our Party positions, without in any way surrendering any item of our Party principles, to consider ourselves more as a Council of State and less as arrayed regiments facing each other in battle. The condition of the House at the present moment invites us to make these reflections, and, so far as we are concerned, co-operation will be welcomed—it applies to a majority as much as to a minority Government—so that by putting our ideas into a common pool we can bring out from that common pool legislation and administration that will be of substantial benefit for the nation as a whole.’

In other words, “ Why have mere Party government ; why not abolish division and all join together as a Council of State.”

MacDonald’s tenure of the Premiership in 1924 had been short, but it was long enough to give him a taste of the sweets of office. It was an appetizer. It did not need a long experience to give him an appreciation of its fascination. The ten months during which he had been Prime Minister had been a hectic interregnum of continual crises. A sincere Protectionist’s political suicide provided the post ; the political suicide of an insincere Socialist made the post vacant once more.

In spite of everything, MacDonald had yearned for the Premiership again. Few there are in these modern times who, having once had a sip of that heady nectar, Fame, will ever forget it or do other than anxiously seek for it again. MacDonald was no Cincinnatus. The kingdom, the power, and the glory that accompany the Premiership are habit-forming with a cumulative insistency.

When the chance came in 1929, MacDonald seized the



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prize. Here were offered him those things which are the highest and most honourable objects of man's ambition—honour, power, authority. He had reached the heights; he now stood alone on the apex of achievement; the more he enjoyed its sunny sublimity the less he desired to return to the dust and heat of the valley. His motto might have been 'To Have and to Hold.' The General Election and the support of his Party had filled the first; to accomplish the second now became his constant purpose. He resembled Charles II, who, after many desperate chances, reached the throne and made but one resolve—*never to go on his travels again*. When MacDonald rose from his knee after kissing the King's hand on his appointment as Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury, he made also one resolution—never to risk the loss of this great distinction. From the Prime Minister's hallowed place in the House of Commons, he would look over the Treasury Box at the envious Opposition, but never again would he join the dejected host that thronged the limbo of the deportees.

This determination to 'stay put' as Premier at all costs was one of the most far-reaching decisions that MacDonald ever took. It affected the whole life of the Labour Government and was the motive that lay behind its subsequent assassination. It implied that he must do nothing that would endanger his position. He saw that two things were essential. Firstly, he must retain the confidence of his Party. It was because he was Leader of the Labour Party that the King had offered him the Premiership. He could be Leader without being Premier, but never Premier without being Leader. Secondly, he must not be defeated in the House of Commons on any vital question. His whole policy and strategy, therefore, must be planned to ensure the confidence of the Labour Party and the confidence of the House, but both factors were external, and neither was within his power to control. His remaining in office depended on two sets of people who might at any time turn against him, and then the beautiful fairy castle of his dreams would be destroyed. No one ever organized a defence with more care, foresight, and skill. He recognized early, and his experience confirmed the fact that his greatest danger came from within his own Party.

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The Labour Party consisted of three well-defined sections. There was, firstly, the Parliamentary Party with three sections—the Government, the Consultative Committee (chosen by the Parliamentary Party), and the unofficial members. The committee formed the liaison between the Government and the unofficial members, who constituted the rank and file of the Party. Then came the Executive of the Party, made up of members of the Trade Union Congress and representatives of the constituency parties. Lastly came the great body of the rank and file throughout the land. These three sections had to be satisfied with his leadership if his position was to be maintained.

Of the three sections, the largest was, of course, the rank and file throughout the land, the hundreds of thousands scattered up and down the country. He took care to keep in touch with them by visits to the most important centres and the holding of great demonstrations. Primarily the confidence of the mass of Labour supporters was kept by MacDonald meeting the key men and women at the Annual Conferences of the Party.

With regard to the Ministry, he was in a specially favourable position. His relationship to each Minister was to a certain extent that of patron. He personally had given them their offices. He could, at any moment, if he thought fit, demand their resignations. There were, of course, certain Ministers who could claim high office almost as a right. These were the older men who had gained a prestige in the Party which could not be ignored when offices were being allocated. There is, in this connection, one consideration that must not be overlooked. When one remembers that many of those Ministers were placed in a position of power and authority, it is easy to understand the influence exercised over them by the person who had raised them to this cherished eminence, and it is all the more to their credit that so few of them betrayed their trust when the final hour of temptation came in 1931.

It would be unnatural to expect that the appreciation which some members of the Parliamentary Party had of MacDonald's power and patronage had not some influence in such members' attitude towards MacDonald. This came forcibly to the front when MacDonald was choosing the members of his

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Government in June 1929. There was some questioning whether Labour should take office as a minority government. Office-seekers are much less numerous in the Labour Party than in any other Party; it could easily be shown that the general standard of personal integrity is far higher than in either of the other parties.

When MacDonald met the Parliamentary Labour Party in Room 14 of the House of Commons, on the first day after the list of appointments had been published in the Press, he showed some signs of nervousness. Well he might, for to him in that audience there sat the sheep and the goats, the favoured and the outcast, and he sensed their conflicting reactions. He had to meet the grateful gaze of those who were in and the reproachful eyes of those who were out. He felt that something had to be said. He did not say it until he was actually on his way out. On his way to the door, he turned and said: 'I am sorry that I could not take you all in.' He paused embarrassed and added hastily the fatuous afterthought: 'But there it is.' So it was. The many, expecting nothing, were not disappointed. The favoured were silent in their elation. The unfortunate were silent in their disappointment, but were waiting—prisoners of hope.

The confidence of the main body of the Parliamentary Labour Party had to be retained and strengthened. Here is where MacDonald's difficulty arose. His policy of *Safety First* precluded the introduction into the House of Commons of measures which might imperil the safety of the Government. While it was comparatively easy to conceal his innate conservatism from his followers when he was in opposition, it became increasingly difficult to do so when in office. It was his duty to initiate legislation, and, if he did not, he must have a reasonable excuse. The one fundamental question that dominated the world in 1929 was the problem of unemployment. It was that issue that had destroyed Mr. Baldwin's Government, and the Labour Party had fought the election on their ability to deal with it. Whether Socialism was a cure for unemployment or not, the result of the General Election destroyed any hope of its being tried. The numbers voting against Socialism showed that the country was not yet persuaded that it was the correct solution. MacDonald took office

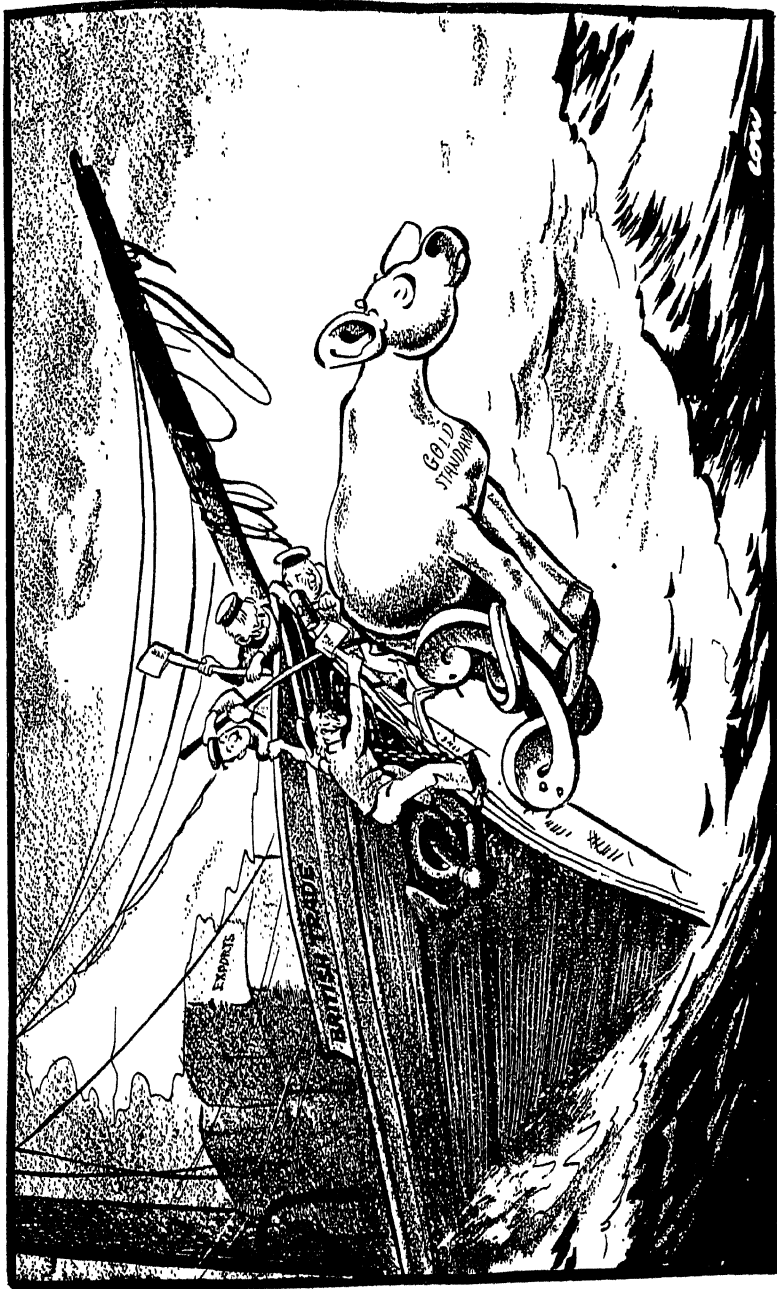
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on the acknowledgment that Socialism was ruled out. He had been warned that any hint of an attempt to introduce anything Socialistic would at once bring the two orthodox parties together against him and pull down the Labour Government. The fact that Labour was unable to apply its own remedy to the cure of unemployment and the inability of the man in the street to appreciate the reason for Labour's powerlessness were two vital elements in the political history of the years 1929 to 1931.

It is difficult to get the ordinary elector to understand the limitations of a minority government. The fact that a Labour Government was in office under the leadership of the well-known Ramsay MacDonald seemed sufficient. When the Labour Premier was accepted by Parliament and honoured by the King, the average elector naturally believed that the power to do things went with the honour. Conservative and Liberal leaders kept exploiting the elector's ignorance and telling him that Socialism had failed to cure unemployment. But MacDonald had taken office fully alive to the implications of an extraordinary political situation. To him the minority position was the best possible. It suited his policy of inaction. To have no majority in the Commons might worry a Premier anxious to translate his political principles into legislation ; it could not embarrass a Premier who had no intention of taking any risks whatever. His policy was to 'stand pat,' and that did not require a parliamentary majority.

The distance a minority can travel away from the dead point of *status quo* is in direct proportion to its support in the House. The legislative measures that MacDonald wished to introduce were such as would not only get a majority of the House but unanimity. The minority position gave him all he wanted without responsibility. He would forgo the power of the sceptre if he might have the glory of the crown.

If only he could keep his turbulent followers in check, *laissez-faire* and 'safety first' constituted the policy for him. But his followers, even those who were not turbulent or extreme, would not have it so. They had been returned to Parliament pledged to do work, they said, and they began to press for the fulfilment of pledges. At first they were dazzled at being the Government of the day ; but, when they got used



THE FIGUREHEAD THAT MIGHT HAVE SUNK THE SHIP.

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to the glare, they realized that the Red Van was not going forward. Somebody was secretly applying the brake.

On 15 July 1929, a few weeks after taking office, MacDonald made a pronouncement about Russia that astounded his Labour supporters. It had always been the policy of the Labour Party that Russia should not be made a pariah among the nations, but should be given her proper status as an independent sovereign State and treated in a friendly and neighbourly way. MacDonald had a fear-complex with regard to Russia. His sentiments towards the Soviet Republic approximated more to the Tory than to the Socialist. Mr. Smithers asked the Prime Minister in the Commons whether he still adhered to the statement of principles which he had laid down in his note on the Zinoviev letter ; and whether, before making an agreement as to the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Government, he would take steps to satisfy the House that, in accordance with his statement of principle, those undertakings could be carried out both in the letter and in the spirit and that the Soviet Government had the power to carry out any such agreement. MacDonald referred the estimable Mr. Smithers back to the debate on 2 July, but Mr. Smithers was not to be side-tracked, and, when further pressed to say if he still adhered to that statement of principles, the Prime Minister replied : ' Certainly.'

There was a murmur of amazement on the Labour benches when that most alarming reply was given. All remembered the stupid way in which the Red Letter had been handled in 1924, and many suspected MacDonald of treachery at the time. Indeed, it was the mishandling of that letter that led Mrs. Philip Snowden, now Viscountess Snowden, to characterize MacDonald as the worst leader any political party ever had. That MacDonald, after sending an insulting note of protest to Russia against the letter which has since been declared to be a forgery, should now solemnly state that that abusive note of 1924 embodied the principles which were to govern the resumption of our relations with Russia, was one of the first indications that the Party received of MacDonald's political policy. There was another side to this incident, a personal side. That is the fact that MacDonald should have answered this question at all. As a Foreign Office question, it should have

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been left to the Foreign Secretary. But this was another example of MacDonald's invariable practice of interfering with the work of his colleagues. Often this intervention took the form of disparagement. This was most evident in his attitude towards Snowden and Henderson.

Although he had no reason to fear them as rivals for his job—neither of them wanted it—yet he maintained an attitude of embittered antagonism. He seemed to begrudge any success they attained and sought to belittle it. He went further, and when either Snowden or Henderson was making good, MacDonald was sure to butt in to minimise their achievements. In the earlier days MacDonald's animosity took the form of depreciation, but later it worsened into something very like sabotage. 'He sickened at all triumphs save his own.'

Although Henderson by his ability, his high standards of honour, his singleness of heart, his sincerity and devotion to duty had won for himself a place of high distinction and a great reputation among all who knew him, MacDonald's antagonism took the form of persistent disparagement.

There was talk of setting up a Coalition Government in 1910. It was to be a kind of Centre Party with elements for all parties. MacDonald declared his willingness to join such a Government if he got a place in the Cabinet, and he suggested that Henderson should only be given an Under-Secretaryship. In 1924 when MacDonald was setting up his first Labour Government he sought the seclusion of Lossiemouth. From that remote village he sent Henderson a list of the Ministers he proposed for his Government. Henderson's name was omitted. He suggested, however, that Henderson should devote himself to organizing the Labour Parties in the country. Later he came to see that this was a definite slight on Henderson which the Party would not tolerate. He therefore sent down another list. In it Henderson was suggested as Chairman of Ways and Means. This was even a worse slight than the previous one. It meant that Henderson would be excluded from the Government. The Chairmanship of Ways and Means is not a Ministerial post at all. To appreciate the gross unfairness of this suggestion, it must be remembered that the office is put to the hazard of the vote of the House of Commons, and with the Labour Party a minority of the House, and with

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party feeling running so high as it did at that time, there was absolutely no guarantee that Labour's nominee would be accepted. The next suggestion was not only foolish, it was malicious. MacDonald offered Henderson the War Office. To understand the real significance of this, it must be noted that at this time Henderson was not a Member of Parliament. He had been defeated at the General Election. We can readily imagine what would have happened if Henderson, the Pacifist, the President of the Socialist International, presented himself to the electors as Minister for War. What a ridiculous figure he would have cut! On his refusal of the War Office, he accepted the post of Home Secretary.

When MacDonald was forming his second Labour Government in 1929, it early became evident that his antagonism to Henderson persisted. Now Henderson was the most obvious choice for the Foreign Office, but MacDonald was determined he should not have it. He had in fact already promised Thomas the post. Knowing that he could not defend his preference for Thomas for this very important position, he decided at first to take the Foreign Secretaryship himself, but realized that this would not be satisfactory. He resolved, after some manoeuvring, to give Henderson the post his position warranted.

In a brilliantly written biography of Henderson, Mary Agnes Hamilton quotes a hitherto unpublished letter written by Henderson to MacDonald from Geneva in 1929, showing that he was obviously furious that the Prime Minister had taken notice of criticisms of his work in 'the stunt Press.' He ended by saying :

'I write strongly, because as the result of my experience in 1924, and now, as evinced in the Cabinet minute, your letter, and the telephone message from No. 10, there is not that confidence when working in the international sphere one is entitled to expect.'

Henderson's loyalty, writes his biographer, 'did not call forth an answering loyalty; rather had he to meet an uneasy, constant suspiciousness, too often expressed in terms that suggested jealousy of any success of his.'

Since the days of Cleopatra, Egypt has been a place where



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history has been made. In modern times it has been somewhat of a trouble maker. During the time that Henderson was Foreign Secretary he was carrying on very important negotiations with the Egyptian leaders in the hope of bringing peace and appeasement to that country. Mr. Hamilton Fyfe tells of an act of MacDonald which was another revelation of his extraordinary attitude towards his Foreign Secretary. He explains that Henderson saw an article in a newspaper criticising the line taken. He asked the Editor to send someone to see him at the Foreign Office ; the article seemed likely to queer his pitch and break down the talks. The first statement the newspaperman made was :

‘ I think you ought to know, Mr. Henderson, that the article was written at the request of your Prime Minister.’

Three years later MacDonald again showed his jealousy towards Henderson. In 1932 the League of Nations, recognizing his great work for Peace, proposed Henderson as Chairman of the Disarmament Conference. MacDonald at first opposed this, suggesting General Smuts as an alternative choice, but gave way as Henderson was obviously the ideal Chairman. It was freely said that the attitude of the National Government towards the Disarmament Conference would have been very different if either MacDonald had not been Premier, or Henderson not the Chairman.

MacDonald's interference in the case of Snowden was even more reprehensible.

A world famous success of Snowden's was his great achievement in the Reparations Conference at the Hague, in the summer of 1929. He himself calls it the most sensational episode in his career. The skill, the courage, the tenacity, and the patience with which he fought his way to success in a matter of great difficulty and delicacy was acclaimed by the whole world. Yet that success at one moment hung in the balance, and the Conference just missed becoming a fiasco and this through the mischievous intervention of MacDonald. The story reads like a thriller and has the essential touch of melodrama. To the French, diplomacy is not only a science, it is an art. Their love of it, and their success in the practice of it have vitalized and illuminated the pages of European

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history. They entered this International *passage d'armes* with all the zest and confidence of a master of fence. But they had met their match in Snowden. The British statesman was playing, with the ability of a master, the historic rôle of Champion of England. He was fighting the greatest battle of his life. He was standing up for British interests against the attack, combined and fierce, of French, Belgian, and Italian delegates. He had made a speech in defining the British position which was so sensational and which produced such an unexpected furore in the Conference, that the Chairman adjourned it to give the members time to cool off.

Completely discomfited by the absolutely impregnable case put up by Snowden, they suddenly changed their ground. The busy whisper circled round. Snowden was bluffing and it was openly questioned whether he had the authority or support of the British Government in the stand he was taking. The wily Briand had even suggested sending for the more amenable and accommodating MacDonald to take the place of this dour, uncompromising Yorkshireman.

It was at this critical moment that MacDonald intervened. He sent an open telegram to 'The Treasury, London,' to be sent on to Snowden at the Hague. A chain of unfortunate circumstances led to this supremely secret message being telephoned *en clair* to the Delegation Office at the Hague. It was to the effect that the Prime Minister thought that the situation was getting worse and that before anything more should be done Snowden should get into touch with him, or that one of them should meet him in London. It was an amazing error of judgment, a mischievous indiscretion. If MacDonald had wished deliberately to discredit Snowden, he could not have done it with greater effect. Of course, as so often happens on the Continent, the line was tapped and in an incredibly short time every delegate and journalist at the Hague knew that the British Prime Minister had intervened.

It was a terrible moment for Snowden. He felt as if he had been stabbed in the back. At this affront many another would have thrown up the whole business and returned to London in fierce protest. But Snowden was made of sterner stuff. Moreover, he knew MacDonald. He acted promptly. He sent a message to the Premier so hot that it might have fused the

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wire that carried it. He declared that the consequences of MacDonald's extraordinary intervention would be disastrous. It would absolutely discredit him. His great task of reconciling the Young Plan with British interests would become impossible and he demanded that MacDonald at once issue a statement declaring that he, Snowden, had the full support of the Government in the position he had taken up. MacDonald, with characteristic alacrity, climbed down in the face of Snowden's firm demand and wrote assuring Snowden that not only the Government but all parties in the House of Commons stood by him, and emphatically approved the position he had taken up. With this in his hand Snowden confronted the Conference. The sensational triumph he subsequently achieved is a matter of history.

'There is one species of terror,' says Samuel Johnson, 'which those who are unwilling to suffer the reproach of cowardice have wisely dignified with the name of antipathy.'

The antipathy with which MacDonald pursued his distinguished colleagues and the discord it was bound to cause, was a bad omen for the future of the Government.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### *THE VISIT TO AMERICA*

When Mr. MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time in 1929, he decided to go to America. There were, to use his own words, many reasons that induced him to pay a visit as British Prime Minister to the great English-speaking Republic of the West. 'The need for establishing friendship between Great Britain and America ; to make misunderstanding impossible ; to discuss the high and deep problems of international peace.' Other influences, no doubt, not unrelated to his personality—his ambition, vanity, and love of display—attracted him to America. Being a great actor, he loved the big stage, the spotlight, the applause, the exhilaration and inspiration of great assemblies.

He had been a notable figure in the melodrama of European politics. Now for the world stage and the floodlight of international publicity.

It was no sacrifice for MacDonald to leave England at that time. Indeed, it is a question whether his eagerness to visit America or his wish to leave England was the more insistent. He would be leaving censure and criticism ; although he had only been a few weeks in office as Prime Minister, he had been subjected in the House of Commons not only to the hostile attacks of his political opponents, but to the fault-finding of his supporters. There was another matter that worried him. The Labour Party Conference was to be held in October. If he remained in England, he must attend it and, as Labour Prime Minister, make a speech explaining and defending the Government's programme. He felt that to give all sorts of promises as to his future plans and proposals would be particularly inconvenient in the existing circumstances. A visit to America was a very pleasant way of escape.

On his previous visit to the United States, when Leader of

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the Opposition, MacDonald had met with the open-handed hospitality for which America is an example to the world. If such a reception were accorded a mere Party leader, how would they receive him when he came with the prestige of Prime Minister, charged with a message from His Majesty, King George V, to make a friendly call on Brother Jonathan in fraternal good-fellowship. It was said by Peel that the English are a deferential people. The Englishman is twitted with 'dearly loving a lord.' But the American, although under a republican regime, proud of his democratic institutions, and knowing nothing of titles of nobility, did not deliver himself from the aristocratic tradition when he repudiated the authority of the British Throne. In place of a hereditary aristocracy, there has grown up in the United States an aristocracy of millionaires—railway kings, film kings, oil kings, and other orders and differentiations. These American adaptations mark the progressive reconciliation of the old rigid Puritan republicanism with the present-day ideas, usages, prejudices, and ambitions of Europe. The 'Knickerbocker' order of Massachusetts, the patricians of New England, the select 'Four Hundred' of New York's social hierarchy, the *Optimates* of cultured Boston, and the hundred and one clans and clubs are the modern transatlantic counterparts of the gentry and nobility of Old Europe. If America lost anything in crossing the Western Ocean, it was not the stigmata of caste. In the eyes, at least, of the American of British origin, there still remains a remarkable deferential respect towards the King. MacDonald had been admitted to that most exclusive of all castes—the British Court. He had by invitation reclined at the feast of the gods, and he was doubly welcome in America on that account. No wonder that there was a hushed, awed silence in the City Hall, New York, when MacDonald alluded to his Royal credentials.

MacDonald appealed to Americans because he was a romantic figure. His career had been just what every member of his audience admired. Here was a man who had risen from extreme poverty to the highest position a commoner could reach in his native land. This man was the leader of a great nation, the confidant of kings. The Log-Cabin-to-White-House tradition is still cherished in America. As the

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revered Lincoln had risen from the job of a rail-splitter to become President of the United States, so the now world-famous Ramsay MacDonald had climbed from the desk of an envelope-addressing clerk to the Prime Minister's chair in Downing Street.

America has made reception a business and hospitality a science. It is the land of the 'big parade' and the 'big band.' The United States is the home of the 'Rotary.' It is the expression of its genial, hail-fellow-well-met, friendly hospitality. In the vernacular of Main Street, MacDonald was a 'wow' with the Rotarians. America, too, is the land of 'Uplift.' Fashionable America dotes on culture; virtuosity is a vogue, and there is as much snobbish affection in Boston as there is in Edinburgh. MacDonald played up to this with complete success. His culture was not too high above his fashionable audience to appear pretentious, nor too lowbrow to seem common.

One of the most remarkable features in the cultural life of America is the importance that is placed upon oratory. America has emulated Athens in placing oratory on a pedestal as the greatest of the arts. Lecture attendance is more fashionable than church-going, and of the church services the most fashionable put a premium on eloquence. As in the realm of industry and of sport the American has brought the practice of oratory to a fine art. The actual practice of oratory is, however, restricted to a small section of the people. The ordinary citizen rarely does any public speaking. At school and at college the picked men, carefully and vigorously trained, are the only people enjoying any opportunity for the public practice of the art of rhetoric. Whatever may be the reason, it remains that in America the fluent speaker is admired and the orator is worshipped. This, and the fact that the average American is a celebrity worshipper, explain the lecture-attendance habit. Anyone with the ghost of a reputation gets a hearing and such a hearing as would be impossible in this country. And this reception is not given only to those who have the prestige of celebrity: oratory is appreciated for its own sake. No one in Britain could imagine one thousand people leaving their firesides on a winter evening and paying to listen to the speeches of two young unknown British students.

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That this should happen in America is amazing to a visitor.

To the land that coined the term 'spell-binder' MacDonald went with a ready-made reputation. His emotionalism, somewhat outworn on this side, was just the style that would lift American audiences to heights of ecstasy. No matter what he talked about, his gift of fluency would make him popular. But he chose his themes with care and foresight. He had been in America several times, and he had been at pains to study the characteristics of the people and adjust his method to the greatest advantage. The average American is devoted to his country. In spite of his mixed origins, he has developed a passionate patriotism. Believing in the pre-eminence of his country, he likes to hear it praised. To hear that done in picturesque phrases, as MacDonald could do so well, would immediately endear the speaker to his audiences. His lofty theme was that the future welfare of the world rested upon the cordial co-operation of the English-speaking peoples. One of New York's greatest Press artists, Kirby of the *World*, had a fine cartoon, in which MacDonald was depicted in heroic mien and behind him the benign figure of Abraham Lincoln. The hero-patriot of America was bespeaking, as it were, the friendly approbation of his country for her illustrious visitor.

MacDonald went to America with all the pomp and splendour of a prince. Indeed, in the floating palace, the *Berengaria*, he had reserved for his use the magnificent apartments known as the Prince of Wales's suite. He had a large staff in personal attendance, and the representatives of several British newspapers accompanied him throughout the itinerary. Thus he got the maximum publicity. Sir John Foster Fraser, who went with the Premier, records an incident that illustrates the keenness of MacDonald for Press publicity. It appears that the photographers who went down to Southampton to get some pictures of the Premier leaving on his great mission, were unable, owing to darkness, to do their job before the ship left. Accordingly they crossed over to Cherbourg, and MacDonald, not to disappoint them, rose early in the morning and posed repeatedly for their benefit.

The truly American welcome began long before the *Berengaria* entered New York Harbour. The United States cruisers

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*Memphis* and *Trenton* had been ordered to sea, to escort the great ship to the city in triumph.

It was a most thrilling sight to see this remarkable tribute to the representative of Great Britain.

From Battery Point to the City Hall was a triumphal procession. New York welcomed as only an American city can welcome. The Prime Minister's car went through crowds of cheering people. Mr. James Walker was Mayor—the well-known 'Jimmy Walker' who became even better known afterwards. He presented the British statesman with an address of welcome. To the breathless quiet of the stately ceremony there came an anti-climax that shattered the solemnity of the occasion, much as a dog would that trotted across the stage in the crisis of a tragedy. The Public Orator, reading the official welcome in a voice rotund as Nestor's, declared that the Freedom of the City of New York be herewith bestowed upon the Right Honourable James Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., Prime Minister of the United States of America. A sudden gasp souged through the great building, and then such a shout of laughter rose as should have rent the roof.

When MacDonald rose to face that great assemblage of people, he received a tremendous ovation. For several moments he waited until the cheering would subside. At last there came an extraordinary silence. The great moment had arrived and that great audience hushed to hear. Well they might, for never had they heard speaking like this before. They were amazed at his extraordinary ability as an extempore speaker. They gazed in astonishment at one who could stand up before that vast assembly and speak with ease and eloquence, without a scrap of note to help his memory. His voice was clear, so clear that it reached the far ends of the great hall. It carried on the wireless over three thousand miles and was heard in Scotland as well as if the listener had been in the same room as the speaker.

His subject was an ideal one for him, for them, for the place, and for the occasion. He struck home when he explained his object in coming :

'I have come on a mission of peace. I believed, when I was still far away from you, that there was a desire in



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your hearts to bless the world by a common understanding between your people and the people of Great Britain, so that you and we together should give an example to the whole of the world of how to pursue peace earnestly and sincerely. We stand here this morning shaking hands, meeting each other, greeting each other, giving and taking the scroll of honour which you have been so generous as to give me, because you, representing the United States, and I, representing Great Britain, feel that looking forward into the future we must be inspired by a new faith of fraternity, with a new courage to follow large and stirring moral aims and supplement all our material achievements by things that belong to the spiritual excellencies of the peoples of the world.'

The visit to America had no results of abiding importance. It was a personal triumph for MacDonald, not altogether as a statesman, but as a celebrity. His reception as representative of Britain showed the goodwill and friendship of America. A high-sounding joint statement from President Hoover and the British Premier proclaimed a state of moral disarmament. It was a pleasant memory with Mr. Hoover in his retirement, but it is forgotten by all others.

One thing remained—the remembrance, by millions who heard him in person and on the air, of a great artist who stirred their sentiment and their emotions by the skill and charm of his eloquence. But America wanted something more than eloquence, more than a pipe-dream of beautiful idealism, before she joined in any alliance and particularly one with British Imperialism. Hoover refused to commit himself as it merely meant binding America to support Britain in defending British war gains. While the peace treaty remained with all its brutal iniquities, all talk of co-operation would be, to use the expressive vernacular of the man on Broadway, so much 'hooley.'

MacDonald was a romanticist, the American is a realist. It is impossible to win agreement and obtain co-operation if every difficulty is evaded and every difference ignored. He never came down to definite policies and proposals.

Since the time of MacDonald's visit, British relations with

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America have not improved, and Britain has seemed to seek her allies in the totalitarian and not the democratic countries.

Still, in spite of America's general 'isolationist' policy, she has shown herself ready, on two occasions of great crisis since the War, to play her part in the protection of international law and to promote international security. In February 1932 Japan's invasion of China might have been stopped if the MacDonald Government had accepted the offer of Secretary Stimson. The American Government offered the British Government to proceed against Japan for the preservation of China's territorial integrity, under the Nine Power Treaty. Sir John Simon on behalf of the 'National' Government refused co-operation.<sup>1</sup>

In the autumn of 1935 America was again anxious to help to make collective action effective against Italy's Ethiopian aggression. There was every assurance of America's co-operation in the support of sanctions. Secretary Hull hastened to clear away possible American impediments to Geneva's projected action, when it was found that Britain and France had no real intention of making their threats effective. The Hoare-Laval exposure completely discredited the 'National' Government and put an end to all hopes of harmony and American co-operation.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Henry L. Stimson : *The Far Eastern Crisis*, p. 162-4.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### THE LLANDUDNO CONFERENCE

**I**n the autumn of 1930 MacDonald determined to challenge his opponents, particularly Maxton and Mosley. He had begun to feel that he was losing his hold and must take a definite step towards confirming his position. He had no illusions as to the importance of retaining the confidence and support of the Party as a whole. The only opportunity of doing this was by going to the Annual Conference of the Party and meeting his critics face to face.

The Annual Conference of the Labour Party is a gathering of the utmost importance to the Labour Movement. It practically controls the Labour Party, and its authority and significance can be seen from the reference to its purpose in the constitution of the Labour Party. There it is affirmed that the function of the Labour Party is *to give effect as far as may be practical to the principles* from time to time approved by the Party Conference. No other political party gives its annual meeting an importance and status comparable with that of the Labour Party.

In an age when the trend of public opinion towards a wider democracy is being challenged by a new autocracy, the basis of the Labour Party remains sternly democratic. Its Annual Conference is a delegate conference. The local Labour parties, Trade Unions, and other affiliated organizations meet in their own districts and choose their delegates. The number of delegates allocated to each organization is in proportion to the membership. The delegates are carefully chosen, and there is often a keen but friendly rivalry in the competition for selection. The delegate himself is usually a person of some prominence. He or she is often a local leader, a person of high standing in the district organization. Sometimes the delegate may even have reached the distinction of being a

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councillor, a magistrate, or even a mayor. Indeed, the delegate is chosen for much the same reasons as determine the choice of a Parliamentary candidate. He is generally a fluent speaker and is often a forceful personality. In the poorer districts, and especially in England, a delegate may be chosen because he is able to pay his own expenses or has the leisure to devote the necessary days to this purpose. A delegate is naturally proud of his selection, as thereby he becomes a person of some distinction, acquires a standing and a prestige which he is zealous to preserve. As the leaders of democratic movements tend to become permanent, so the same delegates are often selected year after year. Made up of those carefully selected men and women, the Conference of the Party can be compared to an Annual General Meeting, a Great Assize, a Labour Witenagemot. It is the only occasion when the notables, the key men and women of the Labour Movement, can meet each other, express their opinions and their criticisms, and all to the greater glory of the leaders and to the confirmation of the brethren in the faith.

MacDonald had always recognized the supreme importance of attending the Annual Conference of the Labour Party. In the first place, it was the annual and essential confirmation of his leadership. If he retained the support of the Annual Conference, his security in office was assured. Moreover, whoever can win over the support of the Conference can control the Party itself. MacDonald owed great deal of his standing and prestige in the Labour Party to the uncanny skill with which, year after year, he handled these great gatherings. His forceful personality enabled him to dominate a conference, and his authority broke down opposition. MacDonald's long experience of Independent Labour Party, Trade Union and other Conferences gave him a wonderful technique and competence. He knew all that there was to be known of the strategy and stratagems of public debate.

As the Chairman of the Conference, he has often delighted the delegates with the skill with which he could nicely estimate the force, the effect, and the relevancy of a motion or an amendment. In the old days, he could conduct the affairs of an Independent Labour Party or Labour Party Conference, composed of argumentative enthusiasts, through a complicated

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agenda of contentions questions with ease, dexterity, and tact. These earlier Conferences were orgies of hero-worship, which were a pleasure to attend, as they gave him an opportunity to receive the homage of the faithful and the exhilarating stimulation of mass enthusiasm.

But this particular Conference in 1930 was different in its occasion, its character, and its importance from any previous Conference that MacDonald had ever attended. Indeed, he was on trial for his political life. His whole future depended on the verdict of the delegates assembled in that immense building. If it turned him down, he was lost. A resolution of the Conference could depose him as Leader, and that meant taking from him what was the greatest achievement of his life, the Premiership. There is no wonder that he faced the prospect with some misgiving. Not only had he to meet the onslaught of Maxton and Mosley—experience would enable him to meet that easily—but there was something much more formidable, because more intangible. Behind these brilliant young Ishmaelites was that growing feeling of disappointment and disillusionment among the rank and file. MacDonald knew that the sanguine expectations stirred by the victories of Labour at the polls and the advent of the Labour Government had been slowly but steadily failing. As the months passed and the hoped for revolution—or, at least, transformation—did not materialize, doubts gave way to dismay, and from up and down the country the branches had sent delegates to the Conference to ask when the Socialist Government was going to produce some Socialist legislation.

This attitude of criticism at the Annual Conference was no new thing. Ever since the Labour Party had had representatives in the Commons, there had been, at each succeeding Annual Conference, criticisms and often attacks on the work of the Parliamentary Party. Even in the days when it was a mere fraction of the House and could do nothing even to influence legislation or administration, it was criticized for its inaggressive policy. When its numbers increased, it was denounced by the Left Wing for the moderation of its tactics and its general Parliamentary ineptitude. In those days, the defence of the Party was that it was not the Government and, therefore, could not initiate legislation. Now it was different.

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The Labour Government had been sixteen months in office. What had they done? 'Nothing,' said the Left Wing. The charge against the Labour Government was that they had done those things that they ought not to have done, and left undone those things that they ought to have done, and there was no good in them whatever.

The threat of strong opposition at the Conference came from the I.L.P., led by that notable, original, eccentric Scots Robespierre, 'Jimmy' Maxton, the idol of Clydeside, the favourite of Westminster. He was a whole-hogger, and his criticism of the Government made no allowance for Labour's position as a minority of the House. He believed that the policy of the Government should have been to introduce definite and direct Socialist measures, even at the risk of defeat. He sat there, a grim figure, biding his time. The miners, too, were a force to be reckoned with; they were a dangerous contingent to have in opposition. Disappointed, angry, resentful, they believed that they had been let down by the Government on the hours question, and they were disgusted with the new Coal Mines Bill.

Then there was Sir Oswald Mosley, the 'rich young man,' as Mr. Arthur Henderson called him. He was definitely ranged in opposition to the Government. He had previously signaled his resignation from his post as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster by making some brilliant and effective speeches in protest against the inaction of the Government. He had his own policy too, modern, original, personal, which had not then developed into that blend of Imperialist Fascism that it afterwards became. In addition, he had a following, few, but fit, of enthusiastic eclectics. Many of the Trade Unions, the Civil Service, and other sections had also grievances, deep and strong, against the Government, and had sent their representatives to ventilate them.

The target of all this attack was MacDonald himself. As the highest honour was his, so, too, were the responsibility and the blame. He was undoubtedly the most outstanding, the most dominant personality in the Government. He was indeed believed, not without some justice, to be the Government. After all, these critics and grumblers, although they were extremely clever and superlatively vocal, were but few in

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number. The great mass of the delegates were enthusiastic admirers of MacDonald. Hero-worship is a characteristic of democracy, and the circumstances had given them some excuse for their personal loyalty and devotion. Many of them had come through those dreadful times when only the most fervent dare declare their political faith. Many had suffered, not only abuse, but the victimization and persecution meted out to those who belonged to the despised Labour Movement. Now most of that had disappeared or had, at least, been lessened. Some of the best people were now declaring that Socialism was perhaps not so vicious after all. To crown all, here was one of the oppressed class, one of themselves, raised to this proud eminence. There is no doubt that, among most, was a feeling of pride and exultation that their leader was Prime Minister, the First Citizen of the Empire, one of the most distinguished statesmen of the day. They basked in the reflected glory won by their comrade.

In that great audience, therefore, MacDonald's task was to propitiate his opponents and confirm the approbation of his friends. Miss Susan Lawrence, one of the best and most capable of the Labour women, presided over the Conference with great competence, discretion, and tact. MacDonald had planned his visit and prepared his oration with the greatest care. Shakespeare was not the first nor the last to appreciate the value of a dramatic entrance, and the entrance of the Prime Minister was staged like that of a great actor. It was, in fact, the entry of a great actor. It was arranged that his intervention should take place on the most important day, and he was timed to arrive at the zero hour of the Conference.

The audience awaited his appearance with nervous expectancy. They were excited, thrilled with the thought that the Prime Minister was coming to speak to them. That fact gave them recognition and their Movement a national significance. It was for this tremendous occasion that many of them had come to Llandudno from far and near. Now the great moment had arrived. At the psychological instant, he stood before them. His reception was sensational. The great host rose to its feet as one man and shouted a tumultuous welcome.

After the impulsive cheering had ended and the audience had again settled down, it was seen that the face of the Prime

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Minister was drawn and haggard. It was the face of one stricken with a mortal blow, and the great crowd looked anxiously at the tragic figure. His first words, spoken with deep emotion, gripped the hearts of his audience. 'I am sure,' he said, 'that you will not misunderstand me if I confess to you straight away that, had I listened to my feelings alone, I should not have been here this morning ; but we die and men remain, and whatever one's feelings may be, my duty has brought me here.' He continued : 'Yesterday you passed, in language of tender feeling and appropriate appreciation, a resolution regarding what happened on Sunday.' This was a reference to the loss of Lord Thomson and other public servants in an airship disaster :

'I see here men to whom death is an ever-present companion whilst they earn their daily bread—my old friends, the miners. On Sunday, it was not so much the earning of daily bread that made those men face death ; it was that magnificent, inherent quality in humanity—the quality of not only acquiring and living and possessing, not only the quality of holding to what they know, but the quality of pioneering, of extending power and personality into the unknown. It is that great quality, my friends, that has driven our forebears over seas never hitherto ploughed by keel of ship, over lands never hitherto marked by the path of human feet, and, at last, we are in the air, and we shall conquer the air as we have conquered the desert and conquered the sea. The Air Service, by the death of Lord Thomson, has lost a great and conspicuous servant. Those of us who are human in our hearts and have got all the weaknesses of human hearts—love for fellows, love for beauty, love for lightness—have lost a companion like unto ourselves, whose place will never be filled.'

He paused ; there was a murmur of sympathy, and he feelingly added :

'May I, Miss Lawrence, for a moment turn this gathering from a Party gathering into a national one, and take the opportunity of this platform to thank France, the Government of France, and the people of France, for their great help-



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fulness, for their understanding courtesy, for their wonderful and friendly consideration, and, finally, for the honour they are showing our dead to-day? France knows how to stand by the side of the mourner.'

Again he paused, as if to divide that exordium from the main body of his address. Then his whole demeanour changed. He straightened up and proceeded with tremendous vitality and force to a defence of the Government.

'We are still alive, and we must do our work. However hard it is to pass from these thoughts to thoughts that are more appropriate to the work of this morning, I shall try my best to do it, and, if you find traces of an unsuccessful effort, I hope you will understand the reason why it is so. We are here to-day at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party. We have had just over twelve months of office as a government. We have had criticisms from inside and outside, but I want to say to you in one sentence, in one challenging sentence, that the Government has fulfilled the confidence that you reposed in it at the last election. I have no apologies—none whatever. I am not one of those who, standing aside, imagine that pettifogging criticism is either helpful or illuminating. The plough, my friends, is in the furrow, and the place for you and me is in the furrow dragging the plough. We have not fulfilled all our pledges. Did you expect us to do so? Our pledges are the pledges of Socialists, the pledges of men and women who know that this system of society cannot and will not work smoothly, and that the great task of statesmen of vision is to transform that system of society from the "is" until it has become the "is to be"; and, in the course of that transformation, rightly or wrongly, my creed, and, I think the creed of the great majority, if not all, of my colleagues has been evolution—evolution applied in precisely the same way as the scientific medical man, the scientific healer, applies his knowledge and his art to the frail and ailing body. He does not prescribe straight away the final food, the final exercise, the final standard of life; but, being a knowing man, a man with an eye, a man not only with scientific knowledge, but psychological knowledge, a man who knows how to lead gently and truly as well as to

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feed accurately, knowing his problem, knowing that it is not a problem of mathematics, not a problem of material things only, but a problem of mental and psychological things, works out a great policy and goes on with it from stage to stage. The men who remain out may say : " You have not got to your journey's end." The men who remain in say : " No, we have not, but we are going to get there." '

After stressing the importance of proper consideration of reconstruction as distinguished from hustle, he turned to the question of unemployment.

' There are,' he said, ' a variety of picturesque and somewhat familiar slogans about unemployment. What is it they say ? " Get on or—" ( A voice : " Get out.") Yes, that is it. Get on or get out. We will get on, and in the getting on, if my experience of the last few weeks means anything at all, it will be somebody else who will get out. We are joined in a Conference ; what have we got to hide ? I detest the ordinary claptrap of Party politics. They are not after my heart, and I hope that they never will be. If we have a case for unemployment, I do not care who gets the papers ; not at all. I will give them to the Tories ; I will give them to the Liberals. I will give them to the New Party that is being formed—I am not sure exactly what its position is, or what its parentage, or what its registration, or what its baptism—but, if it would appear, I would give our papers to it, because the more that we get of honest examination the better will be the schemes and proposals that will emerge from the study. But when I negotiate with a person, or when I am in the process of exchanging views with a person, I do not run to the newspapers at the end of every meeting and inform the newspapers, knowing that the other person is observing gentlemanly conduct, that " I have given him an awful thrashing and a tremendous challenge to his very existence." I can assure you, my friends, that that method is going to be pursued, and that, when all the examinations are over and we have done as much as we can, then, and only then, will we discuss the getting on and the putting out.'

MacDonald's next topic was the Tariff truce proposed at Geneva. He said :

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‘ We have signed the Tariff truce, because we are asking the other industrial nations of the world to come to an arrangement about Tariffs. If they think that, by our signing that truce, they have got us bound and gagged, they will very soon discover that they have made a great mistake. The truce has only been signed to allow negotiations to be undertaken ; if those negotiations are not successful, the Government will certainly be free to take the next step that has been imposed upon it by the failure of the other nations to meet it in its advances.

‘ There is,’ he went on, ‘ another aspect of unemployment—economic development. I almost dread beginning it, because it is a long and very enticing road that I am entering upon, but I shall put on seven-league boots and try to get quickly to the end. Here you have two divisions. You have the ambulance work, which is also national development work if it is well planned—the work by which you take the man who has dropped at the wayside and put your hand in his and say : “ I have got temporary help for you ; come along, my friend.” The other work is described as the “ long view.” I would describe it as equipping industry so that it may hold its own.

‘ I could talk to you,’ he continued, ‘ for hours on what steps we have taken to stimulate existing industry, to help it over its difficulties, to keep thousands of men at work when their works were threatened with being closed, and to find orders for them, I believe—I do not know if I am right—I believe that, if certain transactions of the Imperial Conference are to be published, certain transactions done in the Economic Committee, British industry is not always going to come well out, not because it bears too high taxes, not because Trade Union rules are too oppressive, not because wages are too high, but because it has been itself unable to take opportunities when scores of chances are being given to it on foreign markets, and especially Dominion ones. I do not know, my friends, if we are sometimes spectacular enough. How it goes against my grain to be spectacular ! I like sober, steady, quiet work. Yet, my friends, it is not quite fair to you, because that is all right for those of us who are in the centre, but for those who are keeping up propaganda outside

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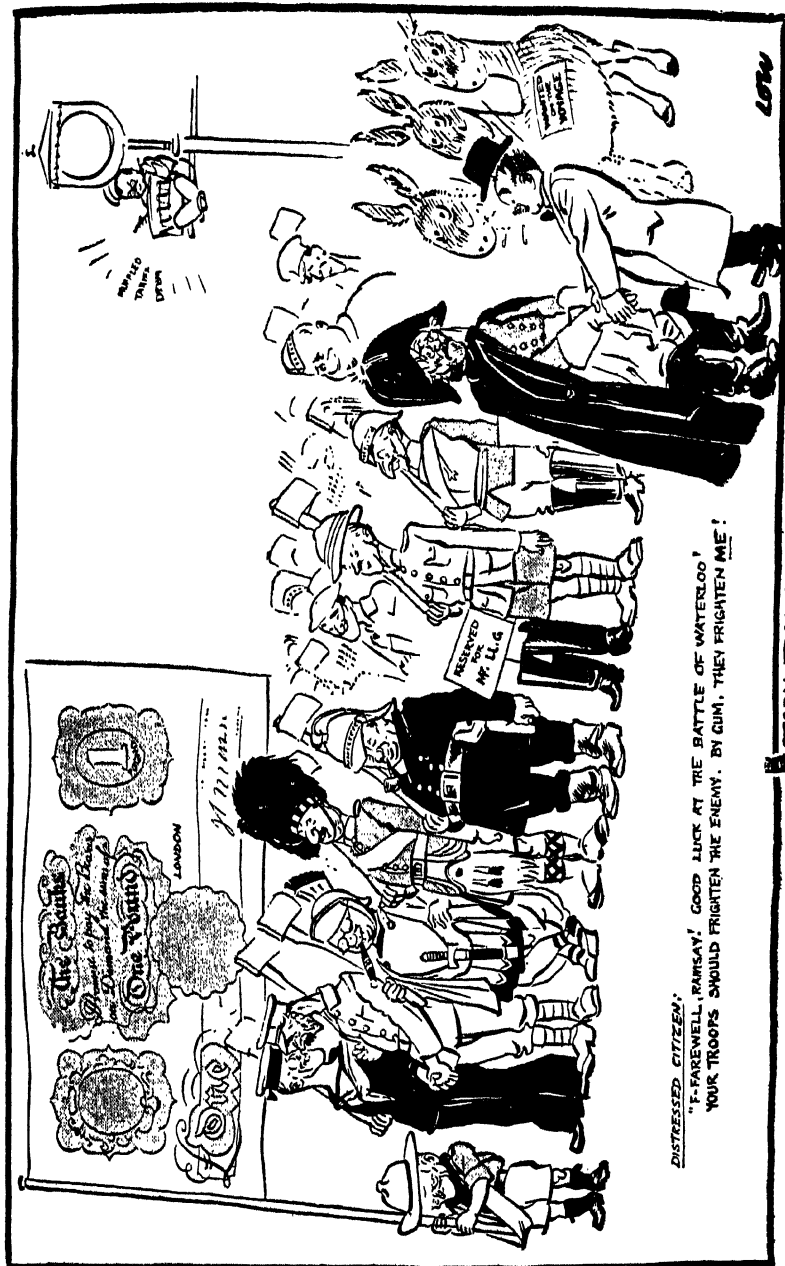
and facing the attacks made upon us, I think that perhaps sometimes it is not fair, in this sense—that you ought to have the knowledge imparted to you. But take it from me now that the work is done day by day, steadily, systematically, thinking preceding action, and I do not believe that there is a single colleague of mine here or in London who does not put more value on sound work than upon trumpeteering.’

MacDonald proceeded to defend the Government from the criticism that it had not raised loans.

‘It is not money so much we are short of; it is work. Work has not been stopped for want of money. The great trouble is—and we have spent any amount of time pushing it on—first of all, you approve of a scheme in principle; then that scheme has to be worked out; then you approve the scheme for operation; and then you discover that the machinery to get it into work is so slow and cumbrous that, at any given moment, you have approved of twice the value of work that is actually in operation then. The actual work in hand is now steadily overtaking the work that has been approved of. But you do not get up one morning, either at Churt or Downing Street, and half between sleeping and waking and wave a wand; and, behold, somebody on a flying carpet comes down with a scheme of how to build a road between Liverpool and Manchester. It is done differently.’

MacDonald submitted that, on the question of maintenance, the figures were appalling.

‘But I want to claim this, and my old Socialist friends understand me when I say it. The meaning of unemployment attached to every one of the two million is not the same as that which we attached to unemployment when we started the agitation in Keir Hardie’s days. My friends, I do not minimize that at all. A man with a wife and children whose income goes down by 5s. a week is to be pitied and helped. Nevertheless, it was not quite that that made the great drive in the old days; it was the man and the wife and the children who had nothing at all unless they went to the Poor Law. You and I hated the Poor Law; you and I ever since have



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been striving to abolish it, and it has gone or has practically gone. That is part of the record that will be told in history of the work that you and I have done during the last generation.'

He continued :

'I cannot finish this hurried survey without telling you that, as the result of the most careful examination and testing and producing of schemes and ideas, we have come to the conclusion that the great work of every constructive Government must be to put its population upon its land. There is a case of planting. There is a case where you take men—I do not mean their bodies only, but their minds and souls—off the pavements which have no roots and no rootable capacity, and put them in the fields, where they till and grow and sow and harvest. (A voice : 'And starve.') Yes, but that it is our problem, which can be settled ; and, after all, that does not differentiate them from their fellows in the towns. In the fields, health and strength and mental power and imagination can come back, and, in the worst of times, if they produce their own food, there is just a little, at any rate, in the meal barrel. It may not be luxurious, but it is healthy, and I wish there were some more of us sticking to that rough, humble fare than there are in these somewhat degenerate days so far as luxuries are concerned.

'We have some criticism from the inside. I wish I could take you up in detachments and make you sit in the Gallery of the House of Commons and see what some of the stuff means that is being advertised with so much valour. If you are out for shows—all right ! If you are out for work—all wrong ! There is work that we could have done which we were unable to do because certain Members refused to accept the ordinary decency of discipline within the Party. My friends, the spirit and the desire that we have is to co-operate together. Our country as an economic unit is changing ; the world changes. Political conditions upon which the nineteenth century was built up are not the same. Economic conditions are changing. We are undergoing an industrial revolution, which, in time to come, will be regarded in the same way as the industrial revolution at the end of the eight-

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eenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century has been regarded. Is that any reason why we should go jumping about, adopting not new ideas, but very old ideas, tariffs, protection, and all that sort of thing? It used to be said: "You cannot cure the ills of a new generation by going back to the quack remedies of two generations before." The idea that is going to save the world now is an idea of organization, not of separation; an idea of co-operation, not of division; and if, as the result of recent changes in the map of Europe, tariff walls have been built up, if impediments have been put in the way of the flow of trade, what good are we doing by adding to those walls? What good are we doing by blocking still more those channels? Our policy is to lead to a more enlightened one of organization, co-operation, the elimination of political boundaries for economic purposes, and it can be done only by Socialism.

'I have been hurriedly describing to you a state of things which the Socialist and Labour thinker told us, more than a generation ago, was speedily coming upon us. It is not the Labour Government that is on trial; it is Capitalism that is being tried. We told you in those days that the time would come when finance would be more powerful than industry. That day has come. We told you in those days that people would say: "Trade is all right, but finance is all wrong." That day has come. We told you that the time would come when the man in the workshop or factory and his employer would no longer be in the simple relationship of master and man, but that the master would become impersonal and that powers that have nothing to do with industry would control industry—the powers of gambling with credit. That day has come. You were launched into your present distresses by the gambling of Mr. Hatry, by transactions in Wall Street, by over-speculation (in which perhaps some of you took part), by over-capitalization.

'My friends, we are not on trial; it is the system under which we live. It has broken down, not only in this little island, it has broken down in Europe, in Asia, in America; it has broken down everywhere, as it was bound to break down. And the cure, the new path, the new idea is organization—organization which will protect life, not property;

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organization which may protect property, but protect property in the proper relation to life ; organization which will see to it that, when science discovers and inventors invent, the class that will be crushed down by reason of knowledge shall not be the working class, but the loafing class. That is the policy that we are going to pursue slowly, steadily, persistently, with knowledge, and with our minds working upon a plan. I appeal to you, my friends, to-day, with all that is going on outside—I appeal to you to go back to your Socialist faith. Do not mix that up with pettifogging patching, either of a Poor Law kind or of Relief Work kind. Construction, ideas, architecture, building, line upon line, stone upon stone, storey upon storey. It will not be your happiness, and it will certainly not be mine, to see that fabric finished. It will not be your happiness, and it will certainly not be mine, to see that every stone laid in sincerity has been well laid. But I think it will be your happiness, as it is mine, to go on convinced that the great foundations are being well laid, that the ennobling plan is being conceived, and that by skilled craftsmen, confident in each other's good will and sincerity, the temple will rise and rise and rise until at last it is complete, and the genius of humanity will find within it an appropriate resting-place.'

The tumultuous applause that followed the great peroration showed that MacDonald had retained his power as a spell-binder. The speech, in spite of its long-winded sentences and confused thinking, was one of the greatest, in its immediate effect, that he had ever delivered. He had completely turned the tables on his opponents.

James Maxton, speaking later in the debate, said :

'The Prime Minister, in his very great speech—I say : "very great speech" because I know the circumstances of personal feeling under which the Prime Minister was delivering it. I could see the deliberate wrench that he made with his own personality when he pulled himself away from the personal thing that was filling his mind on to the work of the Conference. It was a great speech, and it finished with a peroration, which I, who sometimes also perorate, regarded with admiration and not a little envy.'



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The speech of MacDonald was the first bout in a battle of giants, and victory went unquestionably to him. His critics complained that he had made a purely emotional appeal. They declared that he had made no real defence of his Government, but had exploited an act of God as an oratorical embellishment. There were those who questioned the good taste of such a reference. MacDonald, it was said, had deliberately sought to conciliate the miners, who had come to the Conference disgruntled and antagonistic, by comparing their daily danger to the airship tragedy and thus had taken the edge off their opposition. When MacDonald said, in words of real eloquence, that France knew how to stand by the side of the mourner, he transformed the whole atmosphere of the Conference. The four walls disappeared, and the delegates felt themselves lifted to the stage of world affairs; they became participants in a great international occasion. The exaltation was confirmed for the remainder of the Conference by the fact that, a few hours later, every newspaper placard screamed in the ostentatious stridency of four-inch type: 'The Prime Minister thanks France.' After that, any criticism would surely be small, ungenerous, and shabby.

James Maxton, the leader of the Independent Labour Party revolt, ascended the rostrum to address the gathering. Everybody seemed to liven up in anticipation of an exciting speech. If there were to be rhetorical fireworks at the Conference Maxton was the man to supply them. He was proposing an amendment that was searching and provocative, and the cheers that greeted his appearance were a tribute to his abounding popularity. This was the star debate of the Conference, and Maxton was moving what was practically a motion of censure on the Prime Minister and the Labour Government. As his motion expressed the main line of criticism of the Left Wing, it is quoted here in full.

'This Conference views with alarm the failure of the Government to apply the bold unemployment policy outlined in *Labour and the Nation*. It believes this failure to be due to the Government's timidity and vacillation in refusing to apply Socialist remedies to a Capitalist basis, instead of which it has attempted to alleviate the unemployment

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situation by the expedient of competition with other manufacturing nations for foreign markets, which, as Socialists, we believe to be not only anti-Socialist in principle but also utterly impracticable of attainment. This Conference, believing that a state of national emergency now exists, instructs the Government to use all its powers towards increasing the purchasing power of the workers, reducing workers' hours, initiating a national housing programme, extending credits to Russia and other countries, and, above all, socializing the basic industries and services, using the provision of work or adequate maintenance as its first basic principle, and, if necessary, to make an appeal to the people.'

It will be seen that the chief reference is to unemployment, Russia, and Socialism. Maxton declared that Mr. J. H. Thomas, whom MacDonald had appointed Lord Privy Seal and the Minister to deal specially with unemployment, had made a mess of things and had been dropped because there were a million more unemployed when he finished than when he began. Sir Oswald Mosley also had to go. The Prime Minister himself had now taken personal responsibility for dealing with unemployment.

'If,' Maxton went on to maintain, 'the same policy in the hands of the Prime Minister produced no better results than that policy in the hands of Mr. Thomas, they could not throw the Prime Minister overboard as they threw over the Lord Privy Seal. If the Prime Minister went, the Government went down.'

Here a delegate shouted : ' And Maxton will be responsible.' Maxton stopped suddenly ; a gleam of anger came into his eye as he retorted : ' That is a rude and unwarranted interruption.'

While Maxton was attacking Thomas, he was listened to with obvious sympathy and attention. Thomas was evidently no favourite with that gathering. When, however, Maxton turned to attack the Prime Minister, there were rumblings and murmurings of impatience and irritation. Keen and sensitive, he had been aware of the prevailing feeling. He had sensed the difference in the atmosphere, and he immediately changed

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his tactics to meet it. He abandoned his strong line of attack and became conciliatory. Ever since the Labour Government had taken office, he had been its most candid and pertinacious censor. Now he, who had come to scoff, remained to praise. Even the much maligned Labour Cabinet got a nod of approbation. He admitted that he had the highest respect and regard for the members who composed the Labour Cabinet. If he were asked, he added, to choose a Cabinet of his own at that juncture, and in the present circumstances, he did not think he would bother to make any serious changes in its personnel.

Maxton was a formidable opponent. If he had had any gift of political strategy, he might have been leader, not of a group, but of the Party itself. He was at that time a serious rival to MacDonald in popularity.

It is good tactics to conciliate the enemy, and even the wild rebel is susceptible to a little judicious flattery. From long association, MacDonald knew Maxton well, and he now set out to cajole the sentimental mutineer. This is how he did it.

‘My old comrade, Maxton—friendly, but just a little bit troubled ; a very good comrade, but a little bit restive ; still with his hand at the plough, but a little bit doubtful as to whether he or the majority of his colleagues ought to set the line of the furrow ; as wishful to be with us as ever he has been, but not quite sure whether he is goalkeeper, half-back or captain of the team. No, I am quite sure that Maxton could never be a linesman or a referee ; he must have more intimate association with the ball ; and he and I are a little bit in dispute occasionally whether he shall kick it with his feet or knock it with his head. Our disagreements will always be of the very same friendly and sympathetic character, which, I hope, both of us have displayed this morning after disagreeing with each other. I am very much obliged to Maxton for the very kindly personal opening of his remarks. He and I have both been in sorrow ; he and I know what it is ; he appreciates it, and I am so much obliged to him.’

This reference completely overwhelmed the generous, well-intentioned and sensitive Maxton.

In his peroration, MacDonald took the high ground, and

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for a second time that day sent the audience into ecstatic enthusiasm. If this Conference had ended with this speech of MacDonald, it would have recorded an absolute victory for the Government. It did not do so, however, and, during the remainder of the time there was considerable criticism and opposition.

The most notable speech, and one that captivated the Conference, was that of Sir Oswald Mosley, who spoke with remarkable lucidity, force, and eloquence. He summarized his proposals with great skill. It was an extraordinary tribute to his brilliant performance that the motion commending the famous Mosley Memorandum to the consideration of the Parliamentary Party as a definite policy was only lost by a very narrow majority.

In the vote for the new Executive, it was of sensational interest that Sir Oswald Mosley was successful, while Mr. J. H. Thomas, his principal opponent, was heavily defeated. This was a true guide to the feeling of the meeting.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

### *A SHAM FIGHT IN THE COMMONS*

*Conticuere omnes, intentique ora tenebant !*

**A**lthough the project to set up a 'National' Government had been planned long ahead, it had, of course, to be kept secret. If it had been known, the whole scheme would be wrecked. The essence of the plan was that the 'National' Government was an improvisation which had to be set up hastily and quite unexpectedly to meet a sudden grave emergency. The amazing thing is that a secret of such magnitude and importance should have been so well kept. In the nature of things it was impossible that the secrecy should be absolute. In fact, one gentleman in an expansive moment of garrulous hilarity, talked of it in the Lobby. In the House of Commons, too, one ex-Liberal Minister chaffed another ex-Liberal Minister about the post he would have in the new Government. Otherwise few were initiated outside the chosen people, the blessed spirits elect. Now, premature disclosure through the untimely talkativeness of those 'in the know' was not the only danger that threatened the secrecy of the coalition scheme. The other danger was most alarming and had in it the element of absurd comedy. It came, in this instance, from the House of Commons itself and arose, not from locquacity, but from muteness. In that great assembly on 20 July 1931 there was enacted one of the funniest farces ever staged at Westminster. The fact that over it all was the element of danger, the danger of exposure, added piquancy to the affair. What lay behind the comedy was the fact that, when it took place, complete agreement on the setting up of the 'National' Government had been reached between the leaders. Nothing now remained but to wait for zero hour. But the interval was awkward. Parliament was sitting. The Tory Party was

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The Premier's entry was arranged to allow him to get to his place when his first interrogation for that day was to be reached. This was a question by Sir Kingsley Wood, always MacDonald's most acrimonious antagonist. The questioner was a short, plump gentleman with a high-pitched voice. The question on the Order paper was a decoy to give a chance to score a hit by a sarcastic supplementary question. He wanted to know when the Prime Minister proposed to ask the House to proceed to a Second Reading of the Trades Disputes Bill and the Electoral Reform Bill respectively. That was all. Just an innocent question, but behind it, as the Prime Minister knew only too well, there lurked a malicious supplementary. It made ironical allusion to the alleged pact with the Liberals, who were said to have agreed on the passage of an amended Trades Disputes Bill on condition that the Electoral Reform Bill on which the Liberals had set their hearts, would be introduced.

The Prime Minister read the official answer. Then came the real question for which the original question was an excuse. Sir Kingsley Wood rose again and asked whether 'the three lost clauses' had been found; whether they had been lost 'below the gangway' or otherwise. It was rather a weak sample of wit and scarcely worth the loud applause from the Opposition benches that rewarded the facetious Punchinello. The Liberals below the gangway grinned, the Labour Members were resentful, and MacDonald, who was the other target of the laboured ridicule, sat grim and unsmiling with his eyes steadfastly on the paper in his hand.

An ordinary non-contentious question followed and was duly answered. Then suddenly, with the reply to a provocative question to the Prime Minister, pandemonium broke loose. The question had been asked by Sir William Davison. He is a big, blond Ulsterman, who constantly in a stentorian voice—with more than the suspicion of a brogue—calls high heaven and the Government to take note of, and take vengeance for, the iniquities of the abhorred Bolsheviks. For years he pestered successive Governments—four questions a day, his allowance, and innumerable supplementaries. This time his question was deliberately provocative. It had regard, of course, to Russia, and related to the importation of timber

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into this country, which, it was alleged, had been produced under slave conditions. Now Russia was a delicate matter with the Prime Minister, and well the questioner knew it. What was he going to do about this horrible condition of things? The Prime Minister replied carefully, courteously, that the statement that this timber was made under slave conditions had not been proved and, in any case, it would not be suitable for one sovereign and independent State to request permission to inquire into the internal affairs of another sovereign and independent State.

Then the interrogation took on a fiercer aspect, for the young Tory Members joined in their favourite pastime of baiting the Prime Minister, who became rather nettled at the cross-fire of interjections. Meanwhile, Sir William Davison was 'tearing a passion to tatters,' and seemed almost as if he was about to cross the floor to lay violent hands on the Prime Minister. The tumult grew; the shouting and gesticulation culminated in the questioner demanding the adjournment of the House to discuss this disgraceful scandal.

The form in which the motion was made raised a shout of derisive laughter from Labour Members, who had sat through the tumult with growing impatience. This annoyed the mover, and when he looked reproachfully over his glasses to rebuke the offenders, the laugh rang out anew. At last the Speaker took a hand in the game and destroyed the Tory hope of a lively debate by pointing out that the motion was out of order under the oft-quoted Standing Order No. 10. Sir William Davison was unwilling to accept the Speaker's ruling, and another stormy scene arose, but the Speaker remained tactfully firm, and the inquisitive quidnunc subsided grunting.

The House then proceeded to the first Order of the Day which was the Education Bill. The main question was the raising of the school age. To accomplish this piece of legislation every Socialist Member was pledged. The Labour Party regards Education as the first and most important item on its programme. It has demanded equality of opportunity in Education and no one more enthusiastically than MacDonald himself. They were anxious to raise the school-leaving age, not only because it would open the door to improved cultural standards, but for the economic reason that the withdrawal

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of many thousands of children from the labour market would tend to decrease unemployment. The Labour Party has always contrasted the huge expenditure on armaments with the paltry sums spent on Education. When Labour took office in 1929, the Government postponed the introduction of an Education Bill until forced by the protests of its supporters.

MacDonald's attitude to the Education Bill had never been enthusiastic. He would gladly have prevented its introduction, and, indeed, he had been successful in delaying it for many months. Sir Charles Trevelyan, the Minister of Education, a keen enthusiast, had been urging the Government to allow him to introduce a Bill raising the school age. Although this was one of the most urgent questions on the Party programme, the Prime Minister was unwilling to introduce a measure that might prove unpopular. When he could no longer resist the protests of Labour Members, he yielded, and a Bill was introduced to extend the school-leaving age by one year. After many vicissitudes, it was withdrawn, and negotiations took place between the religious bodies interested.

There had been keen disagreement on the financial aspect of the question, particularly over the assistance which should be given to Catholic, Anglican, and other non-provided schools. A proposal that not more than 75 per cent and not less than 50 per cent of the cost of improving and reconditioning schools to meet the requirements should be met from public funds was put forward by Sir Charles Trevelyan and agreed to by the majority of the interests concerned. This would have secured the passage of the Bill through both Houses of Parliament, but MacDonald intervened and would not allow Trevelyan to incorporate this proposal in the Bill. The Bill now before the House made no provision for giving special assistance to non-provided schools.

The first warning of trouble to come was given when the Tory benches began to become packed with wildly excited Members. There was a great tumult of talking and laughing and eager questionings. The Tories were evidently out for a rag. It was known generally that the Government were having trouble with their own supporters, and, in anticipation of a crisis, the hosts of the Opposition were assembled in strength.



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‘Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together.’

There was the usual stir and noise of the hiatus between Questions and the Order of the Day. Quickly the hubbub quietened. A Member was standing alone at the front seat below the gangway, looking towards the Speaker, waiting. He was a striking figure, middle-aged, middle-sized ; his face, bare as a skull, had strong features. His sunken eyes, glowing like the eyes of a zealot, were turned towards the Speaker as he stood there, leaning a little forward on his stick, waiting to be called. He was obviously nervous. The papers he held trembled in his hand. He felt his position keenly. Here he was, a loyal supporter of the Government, a veteran of the pioneer days of the Socialist Movement, popular and honoured by being Chairman of the most important Committee in the Labour Party—the Consultative Committee—moving an amendment that might destroy the Labour Government he had done so much to create. When the Parliamentary Labour Party held its often noisy meetings in Committee Room 14 upstairs, who so calm and competent and tactful as John Scurr, the Chairman.

Conservative Members greeted his first words with loud applause. They exulted in the discomfiture of a Government being attacked by one of its most loyal supporters. He was a Catholic, and he was speaking with the authority of those who were concerned about the financial position of the non-provided schools under the proposed legislation. His amendment sought definitely to postpone the operation of the Bill ‘until an Act has been passed authorizing expenditure out of public funds to meet the cost to be incurred by non-provided schools in meeting the requirements of this Act.’

Mr. Scurr spoke with eloquence and a touch of pathos. His voice was clear, and his argument could be followed easily. He spoke earnestly, as one impressed with the importance of his appeal. Anxiously he claimed that, while he realized the grave responsibility of moving an amendment against the Government, there were times and occasions when all Party ties have to go in obedience to what one considers a higher claim. He repudiated the charge that he was moving a wrecking amendment. Indeed, he had an air of absolute

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sincerity, of a man doing a disagreeable job and doing it because he thought it was his duty. He knew his case and put it with a persuasive and cogent solicitude. He pleaded ; he reasoned ; he implored.

‘To-day,’ he said, ‘we are in the position that we have this Bill nearly finishing its career in the Report stage. We have had no statement as yet made as to the intentions of the Government to provide any financial assistance for non-provided schools. As far as we are concerned, it means providing places for between 30,000 and 33,000 children. That will mean a cost of £1,000,000, and I say quite frankly that at present my community cannot possibly raise that money. In order that this Bill should be effective, if it is passed into law, £1,000,000 has to be obtained from a community which is not a rich community, because the mass of the members of the Catholic Church in this country belong to the poorer classes in the community who have made sacrifices on behalf of their schools.’

The cheers that followed the speech were a fitting tribute to a remarkable performance. There was considerable surprise when Mr. William Leach, a friend of the Prime Minister, rose to support what was in fact an attack on the Government.

Sir Charles Trevelyan’s speech was characteristically down-right, outspoken, uncompromising, and dogmatic. He denounced the amendment and declared in the strongest terms that ‘the acceptance of it would be fatal to the hopes of any kind of agreement because it would be an invitation to obdurate religious prejudice to hold out for the purpose of preventing a settlement.’

After this speech, the feeling in the House hardened still more against the Government. Many strong speeches were made on each side. The House thrilled as Mr. Joseph Devlin, like the last heel-tap of genuine Irish whisky left in the Parliamentary glass, rose from below the gangway on the Government side and, turning towards the Prime Minister who sat with folded arms on the Treasury Bench, made an eloquent and impressive appeal. The Irish orator knew his man, and there was more than a suspicion of blarney in his apostrophe to MacDonald to allow the House to settle the

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question by a free vote. That was the last thing that the Prime Minister would do, although he was evidently impressed not so much by Devlin's argument as by the reception it received.

MacDonald turned immediately to this last of the Irish orators when he rose to reply. He impressed upon him and upon the House the tremendous, the critical, importance of this amendment. "If it is passed," he declared emphatically, "the whole position of the Bill will be knocked into smithereens." Then he gave a pledge that, if agreement were reached between the different interests, the Government would introduce legislation to implement it.

Sitting immediately in front of MacDonald, across the table, was Lord Eustace Percy, who had been Minister of Education in the previous Government. He was watching the Prime Minister as a cat watches a mouse. Meanwhile, Members were sitting in growing impatience. At last, the noise made his words inaudible. He stopped and cried petulantly: "If honourable gentlemen opposite cannot listen to an argument, I have no intention of pushing it upon them." The Members gave silence, like schoolboys chidden by the master. Then MacDonald proceeded with a most remarkable explanation. As he went on, he got more and more confused, until at last Members could restrain themselves no longer and again burst into a shout of laughter. He became more and more mixed.

'This is a question of conscience,' he said, 'so far as the Catholics and the Nonconformists are concerned, and, in the settlement of that question of conscience, it is all in the interest of goodwill and of harmony and of putting this Bill into operation when it is carried, if the Government are left a free hand, as would happen if this amendment were not pressed to a division—if the Government were left a free hand to carry on these negotiations, with the pledge definitely given that, when the substance of a real agreement has been arrived at, when the outstanding problems—'

The House had now got quite out of hand, and, by the time MacDonald had reached his peroration, nobody was listening. Shortly afterwards, the Speaker rose and with great solemnity put the question.

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It was a critical and fateful vote that was to be taken, and the excited way in which Members spoke to each other as they walked in twos and threes to the Lobbies showed that they appreciated the gravity of the occasion. There was eager and anxious questioning as to the result. It was known that all the Catholic Members—Labour, Liberal, and Conservative—would vote against the Government, but it was uncertain how many others in addition. It was a study to watch the demeanour of the Members as they went to vote against the Government. The Tories could not hide their happiness as they stalked into the Lobby, and the Labour Catholics slipped furtively after them with sad eyes and strained faces.

It was known that there would be considerable cross-voting. Members had suffered a bombardment of post cards from those who represented the non-provided schools, and it was thought that a considerable number of Members who were not Catholics themselves, but came from constituencies where there was a strong Catholic element, might be influenced in their decision. The Liberals were, as usual, split. The strong Nonconformist section, ably led by Mr. Isaac Foot, would decidedly vote for the Bill. Others would be influenced one way or the other, as were the Labour Members. The Tory Members could not conceal their joy. They could wholeheartedly oppose the Bill from motives both of principle and strategy. This was their day. This was their supreme chance of a vital blow at the Labour Government.

To MacDonald the issue was purely political. He was always inclined to sneer at the religious enthusiasm of men like Lansbury, Barr, and Foot. He could never understand men putting religious convictions before political strategy. He had been warned by Mr. Tom Kennedy, the Chief Whip, that the division would be critical. He hurried back from the Division Lobby and sat on the crowded Treasury Bench in a curious isolation. His face was grave. He did not raise his eyes to the exultant faces opposite, but sat silent, awaiting the verdict.

Never was a division so hurried. Members were eager to get back to the House to hear the result. As the House filled again, the excitement became intense. Members discussed the issue in loud voices. The din and tumult was overwhelming.

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At last, a movement announced that the Tellers were forcing their way through the crowd of Members standing at the Bar of the House. Presently Mr. John Scurr was seen limping slowly forward towards the Table. The position of Scurr at the right of the line of Tellers showed that the Government had been defeated. His face was pale, and his voice broke under the strain of his emotion as he read out the figures : 'Ayes, 249 ; Noes, 282.' Thirty-five Labour Members had voted against the Government. It was the biggest blow that the Labour Government had received.

When the figures were announced, there was a scene of the utmost confusion. The whole Opposition sprang to their feet and yelled : ' Resign ! Resign ! ' at the top of their voices. The din was indescribable. Suddenly silence fell as the Leader of the Opposition was seen to be standing at the Table. Mr. Baldwin was waiting to twist the spear in the wound. There was more than a gleam of mocking malice in his eye as with cynical suavity he asked the Prime Minister what he was going to do about it.

The question pulled Mr. MacDonald to his feet. In a tense silence the crestfallen chief had to speak. He had, perforce, to acknowledge defeat. He was very angry, but he had to put a face on it. He felt that he had been let down by his Party. He was offended at his humiliation and at the jeers of his opponents. He realized that he must look ridiculous, for he had said that the amendment was of such vital importance that, if it were passed, ' it would knock the Bill to smithereens,' and, now that the amendment had been passed by the House, he had to pooh-pooh it, to belittle it, and to declare that, as it involved no vital principle, its inclusion in the Bill would not make the slightest difference. Mr. Winston Churchill, speaking later, graphically described the incident.

' I heard,' he said, ' the speech of the right honourable gentleman just before the Division. Then, this was an amendment of real consequence. Then, it was one of the gravest issues which could possibly affect the whole course of this Bill. The Government face the Division ; they are defeated by over thirty votes ; and then the Prime Minister rises in his place, utterly unabashed, the greatest living

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master of falling without hurting himself, and airily assures us that nothing has happened.'

MacDonald took the first opportunity to slip from the House. He went to his room behind the Speaker's Chair in an agony of exasperation. As he recalled the incidents of the day, he became more and more irritated and resentful. The ragging at question-time, the atmosphere of fierce hostility with which the whole debate had been conducted, Churchill's exposure of the fatuity of his equivocation over Scurr's determinative amendment, all tended to make him more and more disgusted. He had been flouted, his authority had been repudiated, his pride and his prestige had been hurt. But he was not, I was surprised to learn, so much annoyed at the defeat of the Government, nor did he seem distressed at the set-back to a very important Bill, as he was furious at the treatment he had received. His anger, curiously enough, was not at the Tories who, front and back benches alike, had been maliciously baiting him all evening, but against the Catholics who, after all, had but voted with their conscience, all regretfully and some with hesitating reluctance. It was astonishing that never for a moment did he blame himself or show any appreciation of the fact, known to everyone, that he and he alone had been the real cause of the trouble.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### *TROUBLES IN THE LABOUR PARTY*

**T**he British Parliamentary Labour Party is the most democratic political party in the world. Its leader, who automatically becomes Prime Minister when Labour forms a Government, is chosen by a ballot vote of all the members. The Executive of the Parliamentary Party is also chosen in this way. At the Party meetings the business of the House and the policy of the Party on every issue that arises are freely discussed, the line to be taken in the debate agreed upon and the speakers—each an expert in his subject—approved. Thus every member of the Parliamentary Labour Party has his opportunity of having his say on every question that comes before Parliament. Those who framed the Labour Constitution had, however, not made adequate provision for the parliamentary changes and contingencies that were sure to arise when such a revolutionary innovation as a Labour Government arrived. For example, when a Labour Administration was formed the leaders became Ministers. Nearly all of these were already on the Executive Committee and so were absorbed into the Government. A new body had therefore to be set up to take the place of the Executive Committee and to act as a liaison between the rank and file and the Cabinet. It was the late Mr. Arthur Henderson who suggested that a small committee, elected by private members, be formed to keep the Government in touch with the Party. This became known as the Consultative Committee, was chosen by ballot and constituted a novelty in parliamentary practice. No other political party in the past possessed anything of this kind, formally instituted and functioning regularly. Even the fortnightly meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party was a democratic innovation. It was hoped that the Consultative Committee would keep the Party in touch with the Govern-

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ment and be a means by which proposals and suggestions could be brought to the notice of the Cabinet. The Chairman of the Consultative Committee was also Chairman of the fortnightly meeting of the Parliamentary Party, and acted as spokesman for the Party. In principle, this means of communication should have been adequate to meet the zealously democratic ideals of the Party, but in practice it did not work out so well. As it turned out, the Cabinet system was not only unsuited to a Socialist Party, but contained elements that could not be tolerated in a Party founded on a democratic basis. In spite of theoretical checks, the Cabinet remained a body apart and quite uncontrolled.

The Cabinet system set up, as it was, before the days of political liberty and the wider franchise, has remained unchanged in character and fixed in function for more than a hundred years. It still retains powers intolerable in a modern state and has failed to keep pace with the development of a progressive democracy. For a Prime Minister, not supremely anxious to endanger his position by introducing controversial or party legislation, the Cabinet system worked well.

The advent of a Labour Government was a revolutionary political change, but even such a Government had no power to determine the authority or delimit the jurisdiction of this antiquated institution. Like the famous Italian river it is 'remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.' It is exclusive, cabalistic, oracular and carries out its functions in a ridiculous ballyhoo of ostentatious mystery. Even the room in which the Cabinet meets is a holy of holies. Even empty it is a venerated shrine, and fortunate indeed are they who have the privilege of crossing its zealously guarded threshold. The Cabinet itself is a sacred Sanhedrin and the Prime Minister as chairman followed the established tradition which gave him all but autocratic powers. Indeed it would be difficult to exaggerate the power and authority which the Prime Minister possesses with regard to the legislation to be brought before the House of Commons. As Chairman of the Cabinet he has complete control over its deliberations, approving its agenda, directing its conduct. MacDonald exploited the immemorial usage to rule with a rod of iron. Everything brought before the Cabinet came under his uncontrolled veto, Ministers found



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him constantly and capriciously intervening to prevent, to modify or to delay executive action. He was inclined to be dictatorial and sought to override opposition and ignore criticism. He wished to be a Premier of the real Tory tradition and adopted a patrician aloofness from the rank and file of his Party. He never attended a Party meeting except on the most extraordinary occasions. He was not often in the House. Members caught glimpses of him in the Division Lobby or answering questions on the allotted days. They could not approach him personally for the proctorian guard of secretaries that keep off intruders. He regarded their support of him as automatic; he took their loyalty for granted and their gratitude as a matter of course. He did not inspire that personal affectionate admiration, that hero-worship between him and his parliamentary supporters, which is so essential to successful leadership and which was evident in the case of Parnell. MacDonald resembled Parnell only in his austere aloofness.

Very different were the relations of the Parliamentary Party with the other members of the Cabinet. These made a point of meeting the Party periodically and explaining any prospective measure of legislation and discussing any matters of importance that fell within their respective departments.

The Labour Government had not long been set up when MacDonald's *laissez-faire* policy, to which I have alluded in a previous chapter, became realized and resented. The reaction of the Parliamentary Party to this was a growing discontent. As the 1931 Session proceeded—the last six months of MacDonald's reign as Labour Prime Minister—he grew more and more out of touch with his Party. Fundamental differences between him and his Party became apparent and unrest began to show itself. A few of the more zealous hustlers separated from the main body, became political *Ishmaelites*, formed themselves into a marauding band, which, like Bedouin bandits, kept constantly harassing the flank and rear of the Cabinet's lumbering caravan. The Left Wing, but by no means the extremists alone, were eagerly pressing for a more aggressive forward policy. The Government, they said, were returned to do something. We had made certain pledges at the General Election, and we had to deliver the goods. We had promised

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betterment, a new policy, a better outlook, and, at least, a change from the policy of the previous Government.

On the other side stood MacDonald almost alone, seeking to keep off these importunate suppliants. Behind him, as he sat on the Treasury Bench, was a crowd of enthusiasts, who, as the days went by, were becoming more and more impatient. As MacDonald became more constitutional they became more revolutionary. The Leader of a Party that is keen, enthusiastic, and determined to get a move on immediately, if he begins his term of office as Premier by making concessions to his Tory and Liberal opponents, is bound to have trouble with his followers. MacDonald's reactionary policy with regard to Russia and his deplorable procrastination in regard to one of the most vital and urgent items in the Labour Programme—the raising of the school-leaving age—led directly and quickly to murmurings of discord. Starting almost in the first week of the Labour Government, these rumblings increased, and the malcontents formed a Cave of Abdullam, from which the political banditti waged their guerrilla warfare on their quondam colleagues. Things were approaching a crisis. MacDonald's Castle of Indolence was threatened from within and without. His relations with his Party were becoming increasingly embittered. The New Year had brought more discontent with his leadership.

The cause for this lay deep in MacDonald's policy. Let it be taken for granted that MacDonald was eager and anxious to retain the Premiership. He knew that his great danger, as far as his retention of this office was concerned, lay in the House of Commons. The favour of the King, the loyal support of his colleagues in the Government, the allegiance of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the devotion of the rank and file in the country, all helped towards security and permanence, but all of these could not avail against a defeat in the House of Commons on a major issue. No Premiership, however competent or brilliant, could survive the loss of parliamentary support. Faced with an Opposition of Liberals and Tories which outnumbered the supporters of the Labour Government and well aware that should they at any time combine against him his overthrow was inevitable, MacDonald's policy was that of the astute Louis XI of France in dealing with his

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nobles. *Divide et impera.* In practice this meant only introducing legislation which the Liberals could support. The easiest way to avoid defeat was therefore to refrain from introducing unpopular measures. If he had been able to veto the initiation of controversial legislation, he might have lingered and enjoyed the delights of Lotus-land indefinitely. It cannot be insisted upon too often or emphasized too strongly that MacDonald's one determination was to remain Prime Minister. His political strategy was planned to this end and his every action was designed to achieve this abiding and pervading purpose. Thus he was not concerned so much about the Liberals. He believed they would be with him in any case, and if not he could rely on his tact and parliamentary experience to deal successfully with them. Moreover he knew that he was going to introduce no legislation that the Liberals could not readily support. Believing himself therefore to be comparatively safe as far as the Liberals were concerned, he was specially anxious to placate and propitiate the Conservatives. Now it happened that at the beginning of 1931, the Conservatives were definitely hostile. Their attacks on the Labour Party and particularly on the Labour Premier were malicious and contemptuous. This was specially noticeable when MacDonald came into the House. When he appeared, a muted view-hallo passed over the Opposition benches. His being on the Treasury Bench was an occasion for sneering and sarcastic references. He would no sooner take his seat than the Member who happened to be addressing the House would notice his presence and make some reference to him in his speech. This, of course, is the game that is always played whatever side is in office. 'I see the Prime Minister is in his place,' a Member would say, 'and I would like to draw his attention to——' The presence of a Prime Minister in the House at any time elevates the debate. Members remain. A debate must be worth while to call for such exalted patronage and MacDonald's visits were sufficiently rare to make them interesting.

It was significant that as the weeks passed the attacks of the Conservatives mysteriously moderated until in the summer the War was off and the Labour Prime Minister was treated by the Tories, not only with courtesy but with surprising deference.

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MacDonald's resolve to do all in his power to get the goodwill of the Tories showed itself in the hectic days just before the formation of the Second Labour Government, and led to an amazing incident. The General Election of May 1929 was just over; the Conservative Government had been defeated and Labour was the largest Party and therefore the alternative Government. Immediately MacDonald heard that Baldwin had decided to resign, he secretly and without consulting any of his colleagues got in touch with the Tory Leader and begged an interview. Baldwin was naturally astonished but agreed to see the Socialist Leader at No. 10 Downing Street. What transpired at that strange meeting has not been revealed. MacDonald had only casually mentioned to Snowden that he had been in touch with Baldwin. Snowden smelt a rat at once and there are good grounds to justify his suspicion that MacDonald's purpose in going to see Baldwin was to make a deal with the Tories to keep Labour in office. Snowden, at any rate, was determined that even if MacDonald's overtures were successful he would not, on any consideration, be a party to any such arrangement. Undeterred by any rebuff, MacDonald was equally determined to continue to work for an *entente cordiale* with the Tories. His proposal of a Council of State, made at this time in the House of Commons, was a characteristic and revealing move in this direction. Baldwin, who was at that time very much at odds with his Party, scorned the suggestion; he was in no hurry to transfer himself from the frying-pan to the fire.

All these attempts at *rapprochement* showed a complete lack of appreciation on the part of MacDonald of the fundamental differences which exist between the Labour Party and their political opponents. He alone of the Labour Party believed that a working arrangement was possible. How mistaken he was, was subsequently shown by the fact that the National Government, since its formation, has introduced only Tory legislation.

This desire to work with the Tories tended to separate MacDonald from his Party. As time went on the gap widened and the criticism became more forceful and bitter. It seemed strange that MacDonald, with his canny caution and circumspecting foresight, should have taken the risk that this

# MESSAGE TO THE NATION

AND PARTICULARLY TO THOSE CORRESPONDENTS WHO OBJECT TO THE TONE OF LOW'S CARTOONS.



**FELLOW CITIZENS !!**

THIS CRISIS HAS ARISEN MAINLY BECAUSE  
OF THE SYCOPHANTIC CARTOONING OF THE PAST.

RE HON FLUMSY MACLOW DEMANDS

**A FREE HAND**

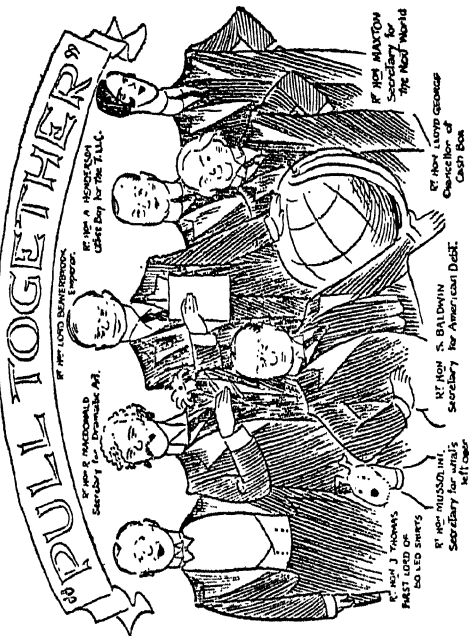
AND

**A DOCTOR'S MANDATE**

TO CURE THE SITUATION.

He therefore disassociates himself  
completely from all parties (including  
the Kid Lewis party) and newspapers.  
Don't blame him for what may happen.

It may be necessary to use drastic measures,  
which will affect the proprietor and editor of  
this very journal Low will not falter



NATURALLY LOW WILL NOT REVEAL HIS POLICY. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE  
MUST NOT BE IMPERILLED. BUT YOU CAN DEPEND UPON HIM TO  
PROTECT THE GOLD STANDARD.

(Now don't tell me, we've shipped off the Gold Standard. I just won't believe it.)

LET US  
KNOW  
YOUR  
FEELINGS

LOW

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increasing alienation brought. I had repeatedly warned MacDonald of the danger to his leadership. It was manifest that if he lost the leadership he must lose the Premiership. I was, therefore, shocked at his unconcern. There seemed to be no explanation of his indifference to the attitude of his Party but that, either he did not mind whether he continued Premier or not—which was unthinkable—or he had some plan in view whereby he could retain the Premiership without the help and support of the Labour Party. The real explanation did not emerge till a few months later.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### *RESIGNATIONS*

**T**he resignation of Sir Charles Trevelyan was a heavy blow to the Government. Trevelyan was one of the most respected members of the Labour Party. He had been a life-long politician, and his father had been one of Gladstone's most trusted Ministers. Sir Charles came to Parliament in 1899 and was an effective defender of Lloyd George's Budget of 1909. He held a post in the Liberal Government, but gave it up when war broke out and helped to form the Union of Democratic Control. His most conspicuous qualities are his high sense of honour, his absolute incorruptibility, the depth and strength of his convictions, and the courage, power, and pugnacity with which he expresses his opinions.

Trevelyan had been putting up a fight with dogged tenacity against MacDonald and Snowden. The ostensible reason for his resignation was the throwing out of the Education Bill, on which he had set his heart, by the House of Lords. There the Conservative spokesmen made effective use of Snowden's Economy Speech in the Commons. Indeed, it looked as if Snowden's speech had been timed as a signal to the Lords to wreck the Bill. Mr. Philips Price has recorded a remark of MacDonald's which reveals his attitude towards the Bill: 'This is the most unpopular Bill we have introduced; it will lose us thousands of votes in the country.'

Although the occasion of this resignation was the rejection of the Education Bill by the Lords, in his letter to the Prime Minister and in his speech to the Parliamentary Party, Trevelyan indicated quite clearly that his main reason was his profound dissatisfaction with the leadership of the Party. In the course of his speech, he said:

'I thought it my duty to hold on as long as I had a definite job to do in trying to pass the Education Bill. I never

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expected a complete break through to Socialism in this Parliament, but I did expect to prepare the way by a Government which, in spirit and vigour, made such a contrast with the Tories and Liberals that we should be sure of conclusive victory next time. But the first session was a bitter disappointment. I instance my own experience, not because it was peculiar, because it was typical. One of our great election cries was to get the young and the old out of industry to relieve unemployment. Both those things could quite easily have been done at once in the first session, and I do not believe that the Lords would then have dared to resist them. Neither was done. It was only in response to an indignant agitation in the Party that, too late in the first session, I was allowed to introduce the Bill to raise the School Age. The very fact that we did not put it in the King's Speech showed to the world that our leaders did not regard it as pressing from the unemployment point of view. Now we are plunged in this unexampled trade depression and suffering the appalling record of unemployment. If ever there was a chance of presenting the Socialist alternative, it is to-day ; but all that we have got is a declaration for economy from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. No, it is not good enough for a Socialist Party to meet this crisis with economy. I resign my position as officer and become a private soldier. By that action I speak. Once for all, I put it into words what I think, and I shall not say it again. I do not believe that the Labour Party can succeed in breaking through to Socialism until the leadership is changed.'

"This was not the first occasion," says Mr. Price, "in which Trevelyan criticized the leadership of MacDonald. I remember his speaking at the 'Nineteen Seventeen Club' in MacDonald's presence, after the 1924 electoral disaster over the Red Letter, accusing him of letting the Party down."

The Members of the Labour Party heard Trevelyan's trenchant speech with a respectful seriousness. They were deeply impressed and obviously in sympathy with the outspoken critic. When Trevelyan referred to the dangers that would follow MacDonald's incompetent leadership, he spoke



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with a deliberate emphasis. Never in his whole political career was MacDonald in less favour with his Party than when Sir Charles Trevelyan sat down after delivering his resolute and outspoken challenge.

Lord Arnold resigned from his position as Paymaster-General on 5 March 1931. He was one of the most competent and experienced members of the Administration. To a Party which does not contain a large proportion of members trained in finance, industry or commerce, Lord Arnold was a great asset. Trained as a chartered accountant, he became a stockbroker. After a short but successful experience in business and finance, he entered Parliament in 1912. He is an expert in finance and a keen mathematician. With skilful care he worked out the application of Labour's policy of the Capital Levy. His talents were recognized early, and he was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to Mr. Montagu at the Treasury when the Liberals were in power.

On the outbreak of the War, Lord Arnold resigned his post, but he has the unique distinction of being the only pacifist of outspoken views in England who held his seat in the War Election of 1918. He earned the affection and admiration of many friends, but his shyness kept him out of the limelight, and he has been always less known than his many merits would warrant.

In 1931 Lord Arnold had been long associated with MacDonald. He spent money lavishly on others; he took MacDonald on several holidays, including one to Constantinople.

The reason given by Lord Arnold for resigning in 1931 was, in the first place, health, and, secondly, because he wished to devote himself more to advancing the causes of Temperance and Free Trade, in which he was specially interested—two subjects about which MacDonald had little enthusiasm. The blow to the Government by the resignation of so gifted, competent and industrious a Minister was severe and might have been avoided if there had been a change in the policy of the Party.

The discontent that seethed in the Labour Party against MacDonald's *laissez-faire* policy had already been brought violently to the public notice by the sensational resignation of

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Sir Oswald Mosley from his post as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Some time later, his resignation followed from the Labour Party itself. Freed from the responsibility of office and the ties of loyalty to any Party, he used his liberty to turn on MacDonald and absolutely overwhelm his former colleague with the violence of his attack. MacDonald was always peculiarly vulnerable to personal attack, and this onslaught was particularly effective because of his previous friendly association with his assailant.

Sir Oswald Mosley was one of the wealthy men whose Lucullan hospitality MacDonald often enjoyed. Mosley had other qualities which made him a much-sought-after young man. Fortune had, indeed, been profuse in her gifts to this cultured aristocrat. He belonged to the exclusive inner circle of society. His eloquence, energy, and resolution, added to a handsome presence, would have made him a notable individual in any age.

Lieutenant Oswald Mosley, late of the 16th Queen's Lancers, late of the Flying Corps, late Independent Conservative for the exclusive division of Harrow, sat on a back bench behind the Labour Opposition in 1923. He had not been long there before he caught the eye of MacDonald and then his progress to the Front Bench was precipitate. MacDonald made him Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and seconded him, so to speak, to Thomas, to deal with employment schemes. He quarrelled with Thomas, resigned from the Government, and finally left the Labour Party.

The real turning-point in his career was when MacDonald gave him a post in the Government. It was significant that when he resigned from the Labour Party, he directed his attacks specially against MacDonald.

Early in 1931 Mosley challenged the Government to call a special meeting to pronounce a verdict on the famous Mosley Memorandum on Unemployment. An extraordinary meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party was held for the purpose of discussing whether or not this should be done. It was held on 27 January 1931. Mosley delivered one of the most effective and impressive speeches ever heard in Committee Room 14—a room of many famous speeches. The applause indicated to the leaders ranged along the platform that here

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was a man to be reckoned with, and MacDonald recognized a dangerous rival—a threat to his throne.

The one person to reply to that speech was MacDonald, as it was only he who could speak with authority on the policy of the Party. The gravamen of Mosley's indictment had been the inaction of the Party, and the speech was an appeal for action. 'Action' was his slogan and subsequently became the title of his propaganda sheet.

The meeting had perceptively swayed to his side. So great was the impression made that many who were there believed that, if a secret vote had been taken when Mosley sat down, his success was assured. A man who could speak like that would be a leader to be proud of, and they compared the bold, straightforward, challenging attitude of dogmatic pragmatism of the young aristocrat with the weak, uncertain, vacillating gradualism of MacDonald.

Instead of MacDonald facing up to Mosley as Greek would meet Greek, he sheltered behind Henderson, who put the case against the motion. Henderson was shrewd, tactful, conciliatory and complimentary. He gently smoothed Mosley down and artfully took the edge off his indictment. He appealed to Mosley to withdraw his proposal. Mosley refused and, in doing so, blundered badly. He had secured an oratorical triumph; he had created a large body of sympathy; he had stirred a new hope of an alternative leader. He failed in that he over-estimated the immediate effectiveness of his appeal. His proper course, having given the medicine, was, like Iago, to 'let it work.' Characteristically, however, he wanted results at once. Like a revivalist, he was out for sudden conversions. The vote was taken in the open meeting by a show of hands. By this, Mosley put Members in a dilemma. As the Government was being indicted, every Member of the Government became an accused person, and to have supported Mosley's motion would have been self-condemnatory. Again, Members would naturally be reluctant to vote for this new-comer and against the well-tried leaders of the Party, especially when the said leaders were lined along the platform, keenly watching every hand that went up. The Left Wing supported Mosley, but he was decidedly beaten.

The revolt and desertion of Mosley was the more regrettable,

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because at that time he did not show any indication of the extreme reactionary policy that he afterwards adopted, and many of the Labour Party were in sympathy with his demand for more energetic and drastic action. The rise of Sir Oswald Mosley was as remarkable as his fall was tragic.

His political life is interesting if only in its chameleon tergiversations. An aristocrat, he began as a Conservative. Moving to the Left he became an Independent Conservative. Then he joined the Labour Party and professed Socialism. He moved farther Left and became near-Communist. Extremes meet. West meets East even if it has to go round the world to do it. Mosley became a Fascist. It is easy to follow the trail that led Mosley from Conservatism through Democracy to Dictatorship. After his riotous living in the far country of political extremism, the prodigal returns home. Back in the ancestral fold he sees that Conservatism is not enough to meet the challenge of a Socialist movement daily growing stronger. Mosley saw that in the modern world Conservatism and Capitalism are incompatible with and are, indeed, both threatened by democracy, since democracy endowed with political power can use that power to abolish both Conservatism and capitalism. Mussolini and Hitler have shown how this danger should be met. Democracy must be abolished. Mussolini, who set up the first Fascist State in Italy, began his career as an extreme Socialist. Thus the wheel has turned full circle. But Fascism is an alien growth in this country and cannot be acclimatized. The typical Fascist is a freak. He alternates from Bombastes to Bobadil, swashbuckler to gangster, berserker to bravo.

It is all but impossible to believe that the quiet, soft-spoken, courteous, friendly, seemingly shy young man, without a hint of hauteur, who sat so unobtrusively on the back bench behind the Labour Party in the House of Commons, had metamorphosed into the haughty attitudinarian who, the cynosure of a thousand eyes, stands a majestic figure, in the blazing spotlight of the Albert Hall, to receive the clamant homage of a multitude of worshippers.

In the veneration of his supporters Mosley resembles Lassalle, the German Socialist, the founder of what became the Social Democratic Party. 'The hot-blooded Rhinelanders received

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Lassalle like a god. Nothing was lacking—garlands hung across the streets, maids of honour showered flowers upon him, interminable lines of carriages followed the chariot of the "Leader."<sup>1</sup> Both young, wealthy, clever, ambitious, the resemblance between the career of Mosley and that of Lassalle is too close to be casual. Admit all this, and the flummery and flapdoodle, all the preposterous pageantry and cheap demagogism of the Albert Hall falls into place as the merest stage properties of the 'act.' Mosley is a political anachronism, he really belongs to another age. By character, disposition, and temperament he relates to the *ancien régime*. An incorrigible romantic, a modern d'Artagnan, he would carry it with an air at the Court of Louis XIV, where his great skill of fence would stand him well.

Mosley, by nature an ardent extremist—on one side or the other. His vaulting ambition accompanied, as it so often is, by a lofty pride, seems to have completely changed his character. He would have been saved from this by a wise restraint or a compensating caution. The adulation of his disciples, too, helped to feed his arrogance and led him to excesses of pompous ostentation.

He had not taken to heart the moral of Æsop's fable. It were better for this curious chanticleer, who would fain bid the political sun to rise at his call, if he would take some feathers from the wings of his imagination and stick them in the tail of his judgment.

<sup>1</sup> Michel's *Political Parties*.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### *A FEBRUARY DEBATE*

From the first days of the 1931 session, the offensive on the Labour Government increased in intensity. The attacks in the House of Commons became more frequent and more bitter. The best line of attack was to denounce the extravagance of the Labour Government. There was another reason why this issue should be chosen. The Liberals could not vote against a plea for economy, and without them there was no hope of success in the Division Lobby. With prudent care and skilful forethought they framed their motion of censure to lure the gudgeon Liberals to their support. Simple as a mother's prayer it looked on the Order Paper, as it artlessly proposed :

‘ That this House censures the Government for its policy of continuous additions to the public expenditure at a time when the avoidance of all new charges and strict economy in the existing services are necessary to restore confidence and to promote employment.’

A defeat on a vote of censure means the overthrow of the Government. The circumstances of the debate and the occasion of the vote of censure combined to give the Opposition a heaven-sent opportunity. The economic blizzard was blowing across the world with bitter, blighting blast. In one year the hunger line of unemployed had lengthened to almost twice its size. We had lost one-third of our export trade. Revenue was flopping. The outlook at the year's end was a serious Budget deficit.

That a Labour Government should be in office at this time of critical trade and financial depression was regarded by those who represented capitalist and anti-Labour interests, as a major calamity. A Budget was in prospect—Snowden's Budget. His views on Socialism, Cobdenism, Protection, Land

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Taxes, Proportional Representation, and even on Temperance, were obnoxious to them.

Organizations were set up of bankers, financiers, and industrialists, and meetings were being held in the City and elsewhere with the object of forcing an economy programme upon the Government.

Although the motion referred only to economy in social services, the real issue was something deeper and more fundamental. The Labour Party believed that unemployment was inevitable under the capitalist system. The increasing expenditure had been caused by the jump in unemployment figures from 1,303,000 to 2,230,000. The attitudes of capitalist and Socialist to these millions were as the poles asunder. The Socialist believed that the unemployed man was a victim to economic conditions over which he had no control. He was therefore an innocent sufferer to be helped, not a culprit to be punished. The capitalist, while doing lip-service to this guiltlessness of the unemployed man, could not bring himself to see the logical implications of that view in his treatment of the man, for whom the system had no use. The Conservative continues to judge the unemployed man as in some way an offender to be penalized, not as a martyr to be assisted and commiserated. This judgment lies behind the treatment of the unemployed by successive Tory Governments and explains the cruelly inadequate scales of benefit paid to the unemployed man, his wife, and his children.

The motion mentions in general terms the increase in public expenditure, but it developed in the debate that the head and front of Labour's offending was that the Exchequer charges for transitional benefit had greatly increased during the year. This was inevitable having regard to the depression. It was certainly no fault of the Labour Government and no just reason for a vote of censure.

The one hope and desire of the Conservatives was to destroy the Labour Government, and, much as they execrated and despised the Liberals, their help was indispensable. It was their constant endeavour, therefore, to frame their motions of censure so that the most timid Liberal must support it. Such a motion of censure was put down for 11 February 1931. It gave rise to a debate which was not only extraordinary in

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itself, but had the most far-reaching results. It was really Snowden's day, but a vote of censure is a very important occasion, especially for a minority Government, so the Prime Minister took his seat by the side of the Chancellor.

Snowden was on his own ground. As a student of finance he was no mere index hunter who held the eel of science by the tail. On the question of taxation he was perhaps the most capable and well-informed Chancellor of the Exchequer for many years. From the first day he entered Parliament in 1906 he had devoted himself to the study of taxation, especially as it affected the working classes; he had, indeed, thought out a taxation policy for a Socialist Chancellor of the Exchequer and had written widely and well on the question of Socialist Finance. He had been official spokesman of the Labour Party and always put the Socialist case with skill and clarity and a conscientious sincerity. All this changed, however, when he reached the Treasury Bench and came under the influence of the permanent officials; he failed lamentably to fulfil the promise of his earlier idealism. It then became clear that Snowden was not free from that failing which he, himself, had attributed to other Ministers of being mere ciphers in the hands of the permanent officials. With all his skill and study he must remain a layman and as such regarded the expert with a certain awe and reverence. Translated into action, this meant that he was inclined to accept the official view and become the most orthodox of the orthodox. With the exception of his Radical views on Free Trade, Land Taxation, etc., he accepted the Treasury canons of financial policy, not only because he respected the expert, but because he had come to endorse their opinion. Taken one stage farther, this meant that Snowden had, in fact, to accept the Tory indictment. If he accepted official financial policy, why had he condoned large spending and extravagance. In fact, Snowden was at that moment, that sight on which the immortal gods are said to look down upon with commiseration—a good man struggling with adversity.

Sir Laming Worthington-Evans moved the motion. His speech was remarkable for its straightforward honesty and impressive force, and put the case against the financial policy of the Labour Government not only skilfully, but with fairness



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and obvious sincerity. It was heard with friendly courtesy, for Sir Laming Worthington-Evans was one of the best-liked men in the House of Commons. No one who heard the resonant voice of the speaker could have believed that within three days that voice would be stilled for ever.

When his turn came, Snowden, a grim, gaunt figure, rose from the Treasury Bench to reply. As he was prepared to climb down, it is natural and characteristic that he should have a preliminary fling at his opponents. Particularly he was determined to have a slap at Churchill, the ex-Chancellor who sat opposite watching Snowden's obvious embarrassment, with a sardonic smile on his face. It would be asking too much to expect such a master of invective as Snowden to capitulate without taking a god-sent opportunity to indulge his faculty for satirical aspersion. Even Churchill, his most formidable antagonist, would not grudge him that satisfaction.

His first words were characteristic of his caustic sarcasm. He ironically congratulated the Conservative Whips upon their energy in securing the attendance of a sufficient number of Members at an economy debate to prevent the House being 'counted out.' This jeer raised an outcry of protest from the Tory benches, and the Speaker had to intervene to still the clamour. The Chancellor was surprised at the irritation shown. Were not his congratulations deserved? Was it not a fact that, on the last occasion on which economy was discussed on a motion by one of their own Tory Members, there was no time during the debate when there were more than a dozen Conservative Members present in the House? Casting his eye along the front Opposition Bench he fixed it on the hawk-like features of Mr. Neville Chamberlain. Was it not a fact that their presence there that day was due to the extraordinary action taken by the head of the Conservative organization? Had Mr. Chamberlain not written a letter to *The Times* containing a sharp reprimand to his followers, for their slackness and negligence in carrying out their parliamentary duties? Then with gleaming eye and curling lip he denounced the ex-Chancellor. He gleefully turned the corpulent Churchill on the spit and roasted him in the flames of his righteous indignation. Who was he to talk of extravagance! While Snowden revelled in his ruthless

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castigation, the sensitive Churchill winced under the lash.

In spite of the sardonic raillery of his premises, Snowden was evidently going to have some difficulty with his argument. He had delivered himself gagged and bound into the hands of his enemies. The Tory case was based on a Memorandum which Sir Richard Hopkins, the Controller of Finance at the Treasury, had put before the Royal Commission on Unemployment. This document had, in accordance with ordinary departmental practice, been submitted to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Chancellor had told the House that he had authorized its use in evidence as a statement of facts.

‘Surely,’ Sir Worthington-Evans had said, ‘it is without precedent that the principal financial officer of the Government should make a statement of facts which convicts the Government of a flagrant disregard of the canons of sound finance. Never before has a Chancellor of the Exchequer been condemned by his own officer for pursuing a course recognized to be unsound.’

That was the gravamen of the attack, and that was the charge that the Chancellor evaded in his reply. He evaded it because of the difficulty of even so clever a dialectician as Snowden in confuting an argument with which he agrees. Sir Richard Hopkins was stating the Treasury view of the financial situation, which was the view of the City, Mr. Montagu Norman, and the Bank of England. The Treasury view was the orthodox Conservative view. It is safe to say that there has never been a Socialist among its higher officials. Although it is assumed that officials in Government departments are outside the sphere of Party politics, it is easy to understand how difficult it would be for a Socialist to hold any of the higher posts of the Civil Service. When the Labour Party came into office, there was no change in the staffs. Officials who had been advising Conservative Ministers on the administration of Conservative policy had to advise Labour Ministers on the administration of Labour policy. In one of the main Departments of State, the Treasury, it was found that there was little difference in the policy of the Labour Chancellor from that pursued under the previous regime.

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As far as financial policy was concerned, Snowden was a more orthodox Chancellor than several of his predecessors. The reason for this was plain. Snowden had developed an inferiority complex with regard to finance. He found that the views of the Department were as a stone wall, and he gave up any attempt to surmount it.

Sir Richard Hopkins, the Controller of Finance at the Treasury, had not only a financial policy identical with the policy of the City and the Bank of England ; he had also a political policy identical with that of the Conservatives. His Memorandum on the Unemployment Insurance Fund could not be more conservative if it had emanated from the Conservative headquarters itself as a Tory propaganda pamphlet.

How could Snowden repudiate a policy in which he himself believed ? From the first day of his occupancy of the Chancellor's chair at the Treasury, these experts had been priming him with this doctrine of economy, and Labour Ministers found the process of obtaining money from him for any of the schemes approved and sanctioned by the Government as difficult as drawing blood from a stone. Even when a scheme was approved by the Commons, Ministers found that the necessary funds were grudgingly given.

Snowden accepted the Treasury diagnosis of the present position and endorsed its demand for drastic economy. What made this debate important and historical was the remarkable passage in Snowden's speech which revealed his own point of view on the very serious issue raised in the debate.

After indulging in his usual rhetorical passage-at-arms with Mr. Churchill, his predecessor in office, whom he counter-attacked for wastefulness and extravagance, Snowden proceeded to deal with the motion of censure. Here his attitude changed. He threw aside the mood of light, bantering raillery. Gone, too, was the more characteristic demeanour of derisive cynicism. It is a different Snowden that is speaking : a new Snowden. Speaking with the emphasis of solemn gravity, he said :

‘ In spite of what I have said now, having pointed out the difficulties, I say with all the seriousness I can command that the national position is so grave that drastic and

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disagreeable measures will have to be taken if Budget equilibrium is to be maintained and if industrial progress is to be made. An expenditure which may be easy and tolerable in prosperous times becomes intolerable in a time of grave industrial depression. Schemes involving heavy expenditure, however desirable they may be, will have to wait until prosperity returns.'

He paused and turned to bring the crowded Labour benches within his view as he continued :

'This is necessary—I say this more particularly to my hon. friends behind—to uphold the present standard of living, and no class will ultimately benefit more by present economy than the wage-earners. I have been in active political life for forty years, and my only object has been to improve the lot of the toiling millions. That is still my aim and my object, and, if I ask for some temporary suspension, some temporary sacrifice, it is because I believe that that is necessary in order to make progress possible.'

The Conservative mover of the motion of censure had begged the House in view of the gravity of the emergency to act as a Council of State as 'the psychological effect of such a step would be immediate.' Snowden had this, too, in mind when he continued :

'As I have said before, this is a problem which no one Party can solve, but the country and the House of Commons must realize the gravity of the position. Instead of Party bickering, which we can resume later, we must unite in a common effort to take effective measures to overcome our temporary difficulties and to restore our former prosperity.'

The reception that this peroration received was extraordinary. On the Government side a stony silence, which was certainly felt, pervaded the Labour benches as the peroration proceeded, while from the Opposition benches the Conservatives cheered in exultant agreement. The contrast was manifest. Every symptom of surprise, doubt, embarrassment, showed plain on the faces of the Government supporters while their opponents across the floor crowded with delight at Labour's discomfiture.

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The reception which the speech got in the City next day was, however, mixed. Snowden's reference to the fact that the situation demanded sacrifices from all and that those best able to bear them would have to make the largest sacrifices struck the City like a blizzard. There was apprehension that Snowden's warning meant increase in taxation. Rumours were bruited about that the Chancellor intended to raise the super-tax and death duties. The result was that there was a serious fall in British funds on the morrow of the speech. While the City welcomed any retrenchment which did not affect its own pocket directly, it was up and howling at any proposal that meant financial sacrifice on its part, and the fall in British 'gilt-edged' was the measure of its fear.

The Liberals in this debate found that their anomalous position had landed them in a dilemma. They did not wish to support the Government, as that might be construed as condoning extravagance, and, on the other hand, they did not wish to support the Conservative vote of censure, as that would inevitably mean the defeat of the Government. Sir Donald Maclean moved an amendment which, as it turned out, had far-reaching consequences, for it led to the appointment of the notorious May Committee. The amendment was :

'That this House considers that, having regard to the effect of the present burden of taxation in restricting industry and employment, the Government should at once appoint a small and independent committee to make recommendations to Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer for effecting forthwith all practicable and legitimate reductions in the national expenditure consistent with the efficiency of the services.'

This amendment gave the Liberals a characteristic compromise. That it should have been moved by Sir Donald Maclean, who afterwards became one of the Liberal representatives in the National Government formed six months later, is significant.

It would be a matter of great interest to know at what point exactly Snowden joined MacDonald in the final plan to form a National Government. There is no doubt that Snowden's whole-hearted acceptance of the view of the Treasury and the City on this question of retrenchment and the curtailment of

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public expenditure drew these two unfriendly colleagues into a strange co-operation.

It is also of interest to note that the Conservative and Liberal leaders in the debate welcomed the proposal of a 'Council of State,' which had been so long MacDonald's desire. While Snowden did not mention a 'Council of State,' he certainly indicated the desirability of a co-operation of all Parties to deal with this financial question. This was near enough, at the moment, to the idea of a National Government to qualify for the confederacy.

The first sequel to Snowden's sensational speech in the House was the demand for a special meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party to allow the Chancellor to make his explanation. The Premier and the Chancellor attended. Both addressed the meeting. Both stressed the grave position into which the national finances had fallen. Both spoke so pessimistically that Members began to wonder why they had not accepted the Tory motion of censure, seeing that they both believed in it. The Chancellor, however, had evidently been impressed by the unfavourable reception accorded to his ominous speech in the House. He emphatically assured the Labour Members that the statement that the Government intended to reduce unemployment benefit, as had been stated in the Press, was absolutely without foundation. In fact, that question had never arisen.

MacDonald addressed the Party in terms of what the late Lord Oxford called 'inspissate gloom.' He was careful, however, to throw the burden of responsibility on to the shoulders of Snowden. 'I am very sorry,' he said, 'but there it is. The Chancellor will tell you. We simply cannot go on in this way.'

The second sequel to this important debate was, of course, the appointment of 'an independent Committee to make recommendations to Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, for effecting reductions in national expenditure. . . .'

It remained with Mr. Snowden, therefore, to give effect to the decision of the House of Commons, and set up such a Committee. This he did, and the Committee became known as the May Committee, whose Report played so important a part a few months later.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### *SNOWDEN AND THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY*

**I**t is remarkable that the meeting which had the most sensational results, as regards the relationship of MacDonald to the Labour Party, and which, indeed, had the most grave consequences for the Labour Party itself, was held to hear, not MacDonald, but Snowden. Members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, going to this momentous meeting, had to pass through the great hall of William Rufus, which had witnessed some of the most wonderful incidents in British history. It had seen the trial and condemnation to death of William Wallace and of King Charles I ; in its high rafters the voices of Britain's greatest orators had sounded at the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

In a small hall adjoining, a hall of great age and also of grim memories, occurred the impeachment of Philip Snowden. Labour's first and only Chancellor of the Exchequer was arraigned to give an explanation and a defence of his speech in the House of Commons, in which he had spoken of drastic measures and the postponement of expenditure on social services and public works. That speech was taken by the Labour Party to mean that their Chancellor had abandoned the Labour policy, had deserted the side of the working class, and had gone over to the side of their opponents. The gloom and disappointment which had appeared on the faces of the Labour Members in the House had given place to feelings of deep resentment, which grew to revolt. A moment of definite crisis had arisen. An explanation was demanded, and this extraordinary meeting of the Party was called to hear it.

As the Chancellor made his defence, I watched him from a position of vantage at the front of the hall, where I could see his face and note the demeanour of the audience. I knew that it was to be Snowden against the Party, and I was keenly

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interested in the behaviour of the Chancellor. He had obviously been rattled at the reception of his speech. For the first time in their experience of him, the Labour Party saw him perturbed and nettled. His defence showed, in its jerky sentences and long pauses of hesitation, how alarmed he was at the effect that his speech had had upon the Members of his Party. He had often before been at variance with them on individual points of policy, but never had he to face the definite hostility, the positive alienation of so many who had been his lifelong admirers. He sensed the antagonistic atmosphere, and his pale, peaked face was flushed, whilst his eyes showed an excited sparkle as he strove to explain, persuade, excuse.

There was one portion of his speech in the House that had been welcomed by the Conservative Press. That was a paragraph which was interpreted as an indication that Snowden intended to cut unemployment benefit. Ten per cent had actually been the figure mentioned in the *Morning Post* and other Conservative newspapers as Snowden's definite intention. At the meeting the Chancellor emphatically denied this. The question of such an economy, he declared, had never arisen. On the general question, although he had been compelled to eat his words, he evidently did not do so with any goodwill. There was no amiability in his demeanour and more than a hint of testiness in his tone. No one likes to climb down and Snowden less than most. The impression left on the meeting was that, although Snowden had been conciliatory, he had not been so from conviction, but was yielding to superior force. He still held his opinion with that fanatical obstinacy which was one of his more salient characteristics.

When he finished his speech, he sat down at the end of the platform on MacDonald's left and began to smoke. He used a long amber holder, often taking it from his lips and holding it in his hand, as he glowered from under his brows at the speakers in the body of the hall. They were making strong speeches. He regarded them with his stern eyes as if his interest in them was biological. He was not concerned with their arguments. His look was one of ill-concealed cynicism. In his Commons speech he had said what he believed. If he had not said it then, he could not say 'I told you so' when



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the crash came. And the crash was coming. His advisers in the Treasury had told him that it was inevitable.

The week before, I had seen Snowden delivering his economy speech in the House of Commons, and I know that he meant every word of it. He did really mean to cut unemployment benefit. No one who heard his words, noted the emphasis of his views, and watched his face, could have any doubt that that was what was in his mind. When he referred in plaintive tones to his long connection with the Labour Movement and his deep desire and solicitude to improve the lot of the working classes—the purpose he claimed of his entering politics—no one had any doubt that the appeal was meant to foreshadow drastic economies. Snowden did not often in his speeches descend to sob-stuff, and, when he did, it was with determination aforethought. Snowden's velvet glove concealed very effectively the iron hand.

He had obviously given way because he judged by the clamour that the time was not opportune to fight. His speech in the House of Commons had been a warning as to what the Budget was to be. If he had had his way, the Budget would have contained the cut in unemployment benefit that he had plainly threatened. This meeting altered all that, and the mildness of the first 1931 Budget was the measure of Snowden's surrender. All he did was to change his strategy. He must bide his time. His time came six months later.

MacDonald also addressed the meeting. His speech was one of pessimism, almost of despair. He sought to frighten the Members about the financial situation.

There was one feature of this meeting that was of great significance. It brought Snowden and MacDonald definitely together. It was a meeting in which the Prime Minister was in complete agreement with his Chancellor. It showed MacDonald that Snowden had accepted a policy of restriction, wage-cuts, and economy, and was, therefore, to that extent in sympathy with MacDonald's *laissez-faire* policy.

The alienation of MacDonald from the Labour Party had been going on for some time. This meeting marked the complete estrangement of Snowden; MacDonald's had been to a certain extent expected; Snowden's took everybody by surprise. Snowden had been later in starting, but he moved

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from coolness to the Labour Party to hostility with greater speed. Although never personally reconciled to Snowden, MacDonald saw how invaluable to his ends the Chancellor's help would be. From this moment, MacDonald kept in close touch with Snowden, to the surprise of all who knew of their mutual antipathies.

It is a remarkable coincidence that, in the first issue of the *Observer* after MacDonald and Snowden had become definitely alienated from the Labour Party, Mr. Garvin published his invitation to MacDonald to get rid of his Party altogether and form a National Government.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### *LIBERAL TROUBLES AND MR. BALDWIN'S*

**T**he Liberal Party in 1931 was also having its troubles. This small remnant of a once great Party, heritors of a great tradition, had many notable people in its ranks. Perhaps it was because it was an army of generals that so many quarrels arose among its Members. During the first six months of that year, this political atom was split several times with awkward and irritating results.

To a minority Government like the Labour Government, relying continually on the support of the Liberals, this tantalizing divisibility was peculiarly provoking. The position became intolerable to Mr. Lloyd George, the Liberal Leader. He had to keep constantly looking over his shoulder as he walked resolutely towards the Government Lobby, lest his fickle followers should skedaddle and forsake him. On several occasions, when the fate of Bills of great importance was being decided, there were almost as many Liberals voting against the Government as with it. At last Mr. Lloyd George decided to bring matters to a 'show-down.' He called a meeting of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, on 24 March 1931 in the House of Commons. Its purpose was to endeavour to adjust differences and determine definitely what should be the attitude of the Party towards the Government. This meeting, which, of course, was held in secret, lasted six hours, and discussion was at times lively—even acrimonious. The meeting failed to find agreement, and, when it came to a vote for or against supporting the Government, 33 Members were for and 17 against.

This meeting was merely preliminary to the larger and more important gathering of the Liberal Candidates' Association, when Mr. Lloyd George gave a quiet, business-like narration of the facts of the political situation. He made a

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very important and persuasive speech, appealing to his fellow-Liberals for a policy of co-operation with the Labour Government on questions on which they were mutually agreed.

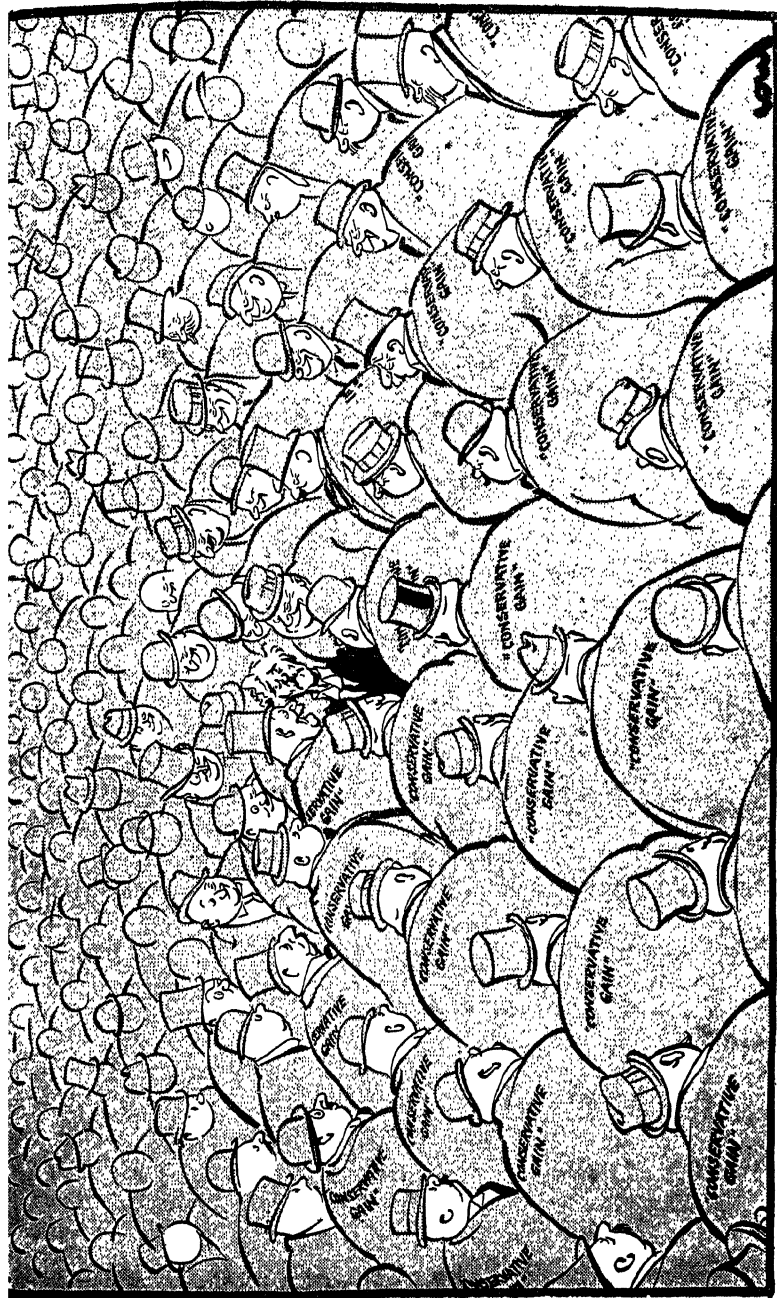
‘This co-operation,’ he assured them, ‘is not inconsistent with independence. In fact, you cannot have co-operation unless you are independent. If a Liberal Government is not to be obtained in the next Parliament, there is a vast and fertile territory common to all men of progressive minds which they could agree to cultivate together, without abandoning any of the principles and ideals that they cherished. The occasion is of supreme importance ; unless common action between two Parties in the Commons working together for common ends is obtainable, the democratic system for which Liberalism has fought for three centuries is utterly doomed.’

Mr. Lloyd George then went on to state a seven point policy on which co-operation might be offered. It was a policy of National Development and Industrial Re-equipment ; Economy in Public Administration ; General International Disarmament ; Settlement of the Indian Problem on the lines of the Round Table Conference ; Free Trade and Rejection of all Tariff Proposals ; a Representation of the People Bill ; Development of Agriculture, Land Settlement, and Taxation of Land Values.

‘It would not be fair to the Labour Party,’ declared the Liberal Leader, ‘to offer co-operation on the assumption that they are to abandon their principles. All we are asking from the Labour Party is that they should do the job and not shirk it.’ This did not suit Sir John Simon or those who depend for their seats in the House of Commons on Tory votes. Simon claimed to have seventeen of a Party, including Mr. George Lambert, Sir Robert Hutchison, and Mr. Ernest Brown, who were Liberals in little more than name.

‘The Prime Minister,’ said Mr. Lloyd George on one occasion in the House of Commons, ‘could not complain that there was not an adequate majority to get measures through Parliament to deal with unemployment, because the Liberals had turned down no serious proposals and would not do so.’

The meeting, although it did not result in agreement, was



"CONGRATULATIONS, MR. McDONALD, ON HAVING GOT YOUR FREE HAND!"

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a personal triumph for Lloyd George. At the climax of his great speech, he won ready sympathy when, with a hint of emotion in his voice, he said that he would be only too glad to be relieved of the most bewildering and thankless task ever entrusted to any political leader, but, until he was relieved of it, he proposed to place such power and gifts and experience and strength as were left to him to do his best to advance progressive legislation in the House of Commons.

This decision of the Liberal Party to support the Labour Government had rather remarkable results for MacDonald. In fact it added another factor to the situation. Here was the Liberal Party pledged to support the Government on the most vital questions of the day—unemployment, industrial reconstruction, and agricultural development.

The year also began badly for the Conservative Party. Just before Parliament assembled for the first session of 1931, Mr. Winston Churchill wrote to Mr. Baldwin resigning from the Conservative 'Shadow Cabinet.' This was the climax of a political duel that had been going on for some months. It was known that intense feeling existed between Mr. Churchill and his leader on the subject of India, and a break was inevitable. In his letter of resignation, Churchill gives as his reason the fact that divergence of view upon Indian policy had become public. Baldwin replied in courteous terms, regretting Churchill's decision, but welcoming his offer to co-operate with him 'in doing our utmost to turn out the present Government.' Although both correspondents wrote thus in friendly cordiality, these amiable sentiments were notably absent when the two met in the House of Commons in the India Debate. There the bitterness and hostility were evident to the whole House when Baldwin vehemently repudiated his ex-Chancellor. What rendered the scene the more amusing was the uncomfortable and inconvenient proximity, on the Front Opposition Bench, of these two participants in the rhetorical contest.

When Lord Beaverbrook proposed to run Empire Free Trade candidates at the election, Baldwin said :

'The Lloyd George candidates at the last General Election smelt ; these will stink ! The challenge had been issued to us. We are told that the gloves are off. If they are we shall see who has dirty hands.'

## LIBERAL TROUBLES AND MR. BALDWIN'S

The Islington by-election brought the troubles of the Conservative Party to a head. In this election a whole fleet of boats was burnt. On one side was Lord Beaverbrook, the zealous Press-political, with his rebel Empire Crusaders, and on the other, strongly and irreconcilably opposed, stood the main body of the Tory Party. The personal vendetta against Mr. Baldwin was carried on during this election with a peculiar virulence. Tories boasting a faith of traditional Conservatism vehemently abused Tories who claimed a creed of as unimpeachable lineage. To liven up this British version of the Kilkenny cats, Lord Hailsham entered brandishing, as only he can wield, the weapon of scurrilous abuse. With a characteristic touch, he described Lord Beaverbrook as 'a man-eating tiger' and as 'a mad dog which would have to be shot if it couldn't be muzzled.' The results of the by-election in East Islington and in Fareham caused great grumbling in the Party and the dismissal of several high officials was the consequence. The discontent in the Conservative ranks, however, continued and reached a climax when a meeting of Conservatives was held in the Caxton Hall on 30 October 1930, at which Colonel Gretton, truest and bluest of Tories, moved a resolution calling for a change of leadership. The resolution was defeated, chiefly on the ground that there was no hope of agreement on an alternative leader in sight. This was followed by the defeat of the Baldwinite candidate in a hectic fight in South Paddington, where Lord Beaverbrook's candidate, Admiral Taylor, was successful.

The attack of Mr. Garvin on Baldwin came a few weeks later. The Editor of the *Observer* said :

'When flushed with success he becomes subject to what can only be called infatuation unlimited. He regards the Conservative Party as his private property. . . . On these lines he, as even the next few weeks may show, will make Unionist dissensions more embittered than ever.'

On 9 March Mr. Baldwin dropped a bombshell into the political arena by announcing that the Conservative Party would not be represented at the further discussions of the Round Table Conference. By this sudden and sensational action, Mr. Baldwin threw the whole Indian Question back

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into the realm of Party politics. It was a complete surrender, not only to Mr. Churchill, but to the Indian Committee of the Conservative Party. It was a negation of the pledge given in the House of Commons and an absolute *volte face* from the speech given at Newton Abbot the previous week.

This remarkable change of policy happened to be made while a sensational by-election was being fought in St. George's, Westminster. Although the questions involved were different, the real issue was the same, whether the fighting took place in the House of Commons, in the Press, or on the hustings. It was the question of the leadership of the Conservative Party. A strong section—how strong is seen by its power to force a strategic retreat—was convinced that Mr. Baldwin was not fit to lead the Party, because of his policy on India. Another section was equally determined on his suppression, because of his antagonism to Lord Beaverbrook's Empire policy.

So it came to pass that, right in the heart of London, in the most fashionable district of the West End, two Tories were again denouncing each other in a campaign characterized by spiteful personalities and malicious invective. Mr. Duff Cooper, a brilliant young Tory, now First Lord of the Admiralty, was the official candidate. Sir Ernest Petter, his opponent, had the backing of Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook, and roundly denied the accusation that he was a marionette or puppet of the Press Lords or that he was engaged in a personal vendetta against Mr. Baldwin. Despite the success of Mr. Baldwin's candidate, the attacks on the Conservative Leader continued. There was a vigorous and embittered campaign of detraction. With the slogan 'Baldwin-Must-Go,' the rebel Crusaders rallied to the attack. About this time a very strong letter appeared in *The Times* by Sir Martin Conway, attacking Baldwin's leadership. It is remarkable not only for the reputation of the writer, but for the reason he gives for his attack. He said: 'He had led them into the wilderness,' and that 'the whole spirit of the Conservative administration was Socialistic.'

It was not, however, on the issue of Empire Free Trade that the revolt in the Conservative Party came to a head. It was on Indian Policy, a question which the Conservative Party, with its imperialist outlook, regarded as its peculiar sphere.



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The insurgent Churchill had been for months attacking Baldwin's policy with regard to India. There had been several deplorable scenes in the House of Commons. At last, the majestic mastiff turned on the terrier that nipped his heels. In a scene of great excitement, in a speech which took the House by storm as one of the greatest of his life, Baldwin went for his tormentor. In a voice shaking with emotion, but with tremendous force and gravity, he hurled his challenge at the rebels who sat humiliated and uneasy behind him. And there was no gift in the gauntlet.

'I shall,' he said, 'as long as I remain here, carry out the policy which I explained at Newton Abbott in no niggardly spirit, but with every desire to overcome the stupendous difficulties which face us. But if there are those in our Party who would approach this subject in a niggardly spirit, who would have forced out of their reluctant hands one concession after another, if they be in a majority, in God's name let them choose a man to lead them.'

The words came as a thunder-clap. Members on all sides, Labour and Tory alike, sat stunned by their overwhelming authority.

These troubles of the Conservative Party continued for the first three months of 1931; then suddenly, mysteriously, but definitely, they came to an end. The top-masts of the ship, National Government, hull-down on the horizon, began to be visible, and, in the joy of a happy deliverance, the passengers forgot to denounce the folly of the navigators. Lord Beaverbrook continued mutinous, but he was not going to get the chance to sign on; he could thus be ignored with safety.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### MR. GARVIN AND THE 'NATIONAL' GOVERNMENT

As seven cities claimed the honour of being the birth-place of Homer, so there are seven claimants for the honour of being the originator of the 'National' Government, but the real and only begetter was Mr. J. L. Garvin. It was eight months after its conception by the Editor of the *Observer* that the illegitimate abortion made its appearance.

Mr. Garvin is a well-informed and popular publicist, a brilliant, erudite essayist. During his editorship of the *Observer*, he has raised that fashionable journal to a position of unique authority and distinction. Every Sunday, *ex cathedra*, he addresses the universe on the topics of the hour. His versatility is marvellous and his scholarship profound. In words of 'learned length and thundering sound,' he preaches, Sunday by Sunday, the effete misoneism and calvinistic imperialism of Victorian politicians. An incorrigible transcendentalist, he glorifies the shibboleths of his Party until he sees them as the very oracles of God. He views domestic politics as with an astronomical telescope, which so magnifies everything that he sometimes mistakes a louse on the lens for a mammoth in the moon. His weekly serial is written in rounded periods of Attic prose, but often it has a Swiftian sententiousness and sometimes a Johnsonian verbosity.

On 25 January 1931 there appeared in the *Observer* an article by Mr. Garvin which created a sensation and was, indeed, worthy of the best days of political lampooning. It was written in the flaming heat of angry exasperation and shows a skill in the art of vituperation of which he is so conspicuous a master, but there is a rollicking Irish extravagance about his abuse that makes it more humorous than harmful. The caption describes the political situation as a Medley of Muddle. Then, waving his rhetorical shillelagh,

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spiky with abusive epithets, Mr. Garvin hits every head in sight. Labour, Liberal, or Conservative alike come under his belabouring cudgel.

He begins by describing the Labour Ministers as 'loathing their lives and dreading still to die,' and compares them to

'the miserable soliloquist in Byron's *Manfred*, who sold himself to the Prince of Darkness. They are like Micawber, too, in their hope that something to their advantage will turn up. For this chance, they are prepared apparently to turn the other cheek repeatedly with an edifying agility, hitherto thought beyond the powers of Christian meekness in politics.'

Then he catches sight of a Liberal Roundhead; down comes the blackthorn.

'The Liberals,' he cries, 'are in an execrable quandary; no matter how much they attack the Government on detail, their last desire is a dissolution. They are the balance-holders in this Parliament. They can do nothing but hold a candle to the devil. In the House, they support the Government by threatening to prop up its back with a fixed bayonet.'

He refers to the situation in which the Labour Government has to have the support of another Party to pass its Bills as a pantomime of Parliamentary humbug. 'But the most ludicrous factor in the whole situation,' he says, 'is the fact that the Liberals support the Government in the House of Commons and execrate it in the constituencies.'

This is a strange complaint to come from the official biographer of Joseph Chamberlain. Mr. Garvin must have known well, from his reading of the period, that, in the spacious days of Chamberlain and Gladstone, minority Governments were much more common than they are to-day. Surely there is no inconsistency here. The Liberals merely vote for the Liberal measures in the House which they advocate in the constituencies. To do otherwise would be to vote not on principle but for reasons of tactics or strategy.

Then he takes a wider view.

'While the country never was in direr need of a strong Government, it never had a weaker by comparison with

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public needs in the gravest economic crisis through which modern Britain has ever passed. There is no longer any certainty that another General Election, even if it could be brought about, would mean a change for the better.'

There is a *naïveté* about this that attracts, like the unconscious ingenuousness of a child. What Mr. Garvin laments is that what he calls the topsy-turvydom at Westminster is a true replica of the 'medley of muddle' in the country. Paralysis in Parliament is a true reflection of the nation's diversity of opinion. People will not swallow Conservatism, try Mr. Garvin, the skilful chef, never so hard to garnish the dish. Another election would not improve matters. The only strong Government in Mr. Garvin's eyes is a Tory Government. He does not see any prospect of getting that, and he is dreadfully annoyed.

'This topsy-turvydom at Westminster,' he continues, 'discredits Parliamentary institutions themselves. In that sense, it injures the common interest, irrespective of Party. It exasperates the feeling and baffles the comprehension of the ordinary citizen in every Party.'

The real reason for Mr. Garvin's exasperation can be traced to the result of the General Election of 1929, which was a great blow to the Conservative Party. In 1924 it had been swept into power on a wave of panic stirred up by the notorious Red Letter. For nearly five years it used a monster majority of more than two hundred over all other Parties to pass, in spite of strenuous opposition of Liberals and Labour, what was purely class legislation. Several of their measures, such as the Trades Disputes Bill, were denounced by Conservatives themselves as partisan and reactionary, but all effective criticism was overwhelmed by the sheer force of numbers in the division lobbies.

Neither the Liberal nor the Labour Party could initiate any legislation during those years, and every single item of legislation proposed by the Conservative Government in the Commons was received in the Lords not only with approval but with as much enthusiastic acclamation as is possible in that sober and dignified assembly.

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Mr. Garvin speaks truth. A minority Government infuriates everyone, but surely the reason for this does not 'baffle the comprehension of every citizen irrespective of Party.' Every citizen is bound to be discontented with a minority Government. The man who supported Labour at the polls is exasperated because the Government cannot get him the Socialist legislation for which he voted. The Conservative voter is exasperated because he knows that a Labour Government will not give him tariffs, income-tax relief, super-tax relief, and other items of Tory policy for which he voted. The Liberal is exasperated because, under the working of the present electoral system, the five million people who voted for Liberal candidates at the General Election only got a mere handful of representatives into the House of Commons. He, too, cannot get the items of the Liberal programme he would like.

It must annoy Mr. Garvin to know that all men do not vote as he would wish them to do, but then in a democracy that must always happen, however obnoxious it may be to him. He cannot understand how anyone should wish to vote other than Conservative. When a people, exercising their free choice, turn out a Conservative Government, which had a two hundred majority, Mr. Garvin, as a zealous Conservative, must naturally be angry, but the alternatives are the abolition of popular franchise or Nazi Elections.

What Mr. Garvin called 'a medley of muddle,' 'mutual paralysis,' etc., was merely the everyday practice of Government during a period when, in a constitutional democracy, no Party in the House of Commons has a majority over the others.

The Party system is all right if the Conservative Party is in office. There was not a whimper from Mr. Garvin during the five years that the Conservatives were in power from 1924 to 1929. It is only when a Tory majority of two hundred is wiped out that Mr. Garvin uses his rhetoric in execration of the Party system. The fact is that Mr. Garvin is a bad loser. When he loses the game, he demands a change of the rules. In this connection he describes Mr. Baldwin's disruptive feud with Lord Beaverbrook as 'against every dictate of common sense.'

A careful study of the political situation leads Mr. Garvin to one conclusion. He realizes that a General Election on

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Party lines cannot give him the Conservative Government he needs. He must try another method ; there is only one other way—Coalition. Disraeli's fly-blown phylactery, 'England does not like Coalitions,' was a sententious product of that subtle politician's cynicism and was uttered at a time when a Coalition of Peelites and Liberals had thrown him out of office. Then, of course, Disraeli always believed that, in office or out, he could speak for England.

There had been more or less vague references to a sort of Coalition before. Mr. Garvin refers to his proposal of one away back in 1910.

'Amidst the political tumults after King Edward's death, the project of a National Government was earnestly discussed behind the scenes. Mr. Lloyd George, to his honour, was in favour of it no less than Mr. Churchill, and Lord Birkenhead. In the Press, at the same time, this journal, seeing the steady approach of catastrophe in Europe, was the strongest advocate of the project. Could it have been realized then, the Great War itself might have been prevented, and all the disasters for which we are paying to-day. Most statesmen of all Parties were too incredulous and blind. They went on with their common cries and scuffles—until the War came on them like a thunderbolt at last and forced them to National Government too late for its best purposes.'

This reference is interesting, for it is known that MacDonald, in 1910, was prepared to enter a National Government as a representative of the Labour Party, and to have a seat in the Cabinet. Arthur Henderson was to have an Under-Secretaryship. MacDonald had no authority from the Labour Party to enter into such arrangement. The suggestion was, of course, preposterous. Henderson would not countenance it for a moment, and so the intrigue faded out.

Then the germ of the idea appeared again in the strange 'Council of State' speech in June 1929. This was the first speech of MacDonald's second term as Premier, and in it blandly invited the other two Parties to join him in some vague kind of coalition. Although the proposal became the joke of the session, it led to angry protests at the Party meeting, and there is no doubt that, had it been made in other circum-

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stances it would have had serious consequences as far as MacDonald was concerned. As it was, the speech marked the beginning of the disaffection towards MacDonald that grew as months passed.

It is interesting to note, in view of subsequent events, that the suggestion had the opposite effect on Sir Herbert Samuel. He welcomed it with loud hosannas, as did also Mr. Geoffrey Shakespeare, a young Liberal who had formerly been on the staff of Mr. Lloyd George. Both these Liberals were afterwards rewarded for their concurrence with posts in the National Government.

Mr. Winston Churchill in July 1929 gave a hint of a policy that might be pursued by the Conservative Party. While he dismissed the Prime Minister's Council of State proposal with a sneer of contempt, he saw benefits to both sides in a friendly Liberal-Conservative *rapprochement*.

'There are,' he said, 'gulfs between us in this Parliament. It is no use supposing that we can simply meet together as a Council of State. I hope and believe that the floor will prove to be broader than the gangway, but the gulf between the Socialist Party and the rest of the country is, in any case, impassable. There never has been such a gulf in my experience between a Government and an Opposition.'

This, expressed in the characteristic idiom of Mr. Churchill, is a discriminating appreciation of the Parliamentary situation. The wide floor stretches between Conservative and Labour, but only the narrow gangway separates Conservative from Liberal. It was, therefore, to coalition with the Liberals that the Conservatives must look if the obnoxious Labour Government was to be destroyed. What, then, prevented that coalition and the attainment of this object? Mr. Garvin had no doubts about that. It was the attitude of hostility to Mr. Lloyd George and the Liberals, taken up by Mr. Baldwin and the Conservative Party.

'Mr. Baldwin's friends,' said Mr. Garvin, 'have gone out of their way during the last few months to load Mr. Lloyd George with odium and to treat him with petty indignities. Now, nothing can change the fact that Mr. Lloyd George's

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place amongst historic English statesmen is as secure as Chatham's, whose disappointing fortunes in peace are repeated so far by his own. The meaner sort of Conservative partisanship at his expense, though encouraged by Mr. Baldwin's own attitude, is repulsive to every citizen with a spark of patriotic gratitude and honourable memory. Not only that. This sort of petty rancour is the most short-sighted policy in their own interests that official Conservatives could have pursued ; and they will have to pay more for it than they suppose. That Conservatives should abuse Liberals in one breath and then summon them in the next to *work without wages* for Conservative interests, and even to arrange their funeral in order to bring Mr. Baldwin back to power—this is one of the most amusing exhibitions of sheer partisan egotism that English politics have ever seen. It would be incredible on the comic stage.

'The only way on earth,' added Mr. Garvin, 'to turn out the Cabinet and establish instead a strong National Government, supported by a decisive majority of the people, is for Official Conservatism to make a solid compromise with Liberalism on the basis of a definite programme for a limited time.'

So on 25 January 1931 a coalition between Conservative and Liberal for the overthrow of Labour was Mr. Garvin's way out of 'the gravest economic crisis through which modern Britain ever passed.'

Since the election of 1929 the Tory Opposition had been carrying out a policy of disparagement of the Labour Government. When, however, the House resumed after the Christmas recess in January 1931, there was a great change in the tactics of the Conservative Opposition. It was no longer the censorious remonstrance or sneering criticism. On the first day, a tremendous attack was made on the Labour Government. The onslaught was so violent, so incessant and so ruthless that Mr. Garvin declared that the Opposition were convinced that they could not fail and that they would be able to turn the Government out not later than February. For weeks the House of Commons was the scene of tremendous battles. All in vain, however. It was plain that the Government could not



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be defeated without Liberal co-operation. In Mr. Garvin's considered opinion, Mr. Baldwin's tactless and foolish attitude towards Mr. Lloyd George had weakened any hope of Liberal help in turning out the Government. When, to crown all, the Liberals came to an informal working understanding with the Government and the Liberal leader warmly supported the Government with regard to Unemployment and Agriculture, the hope of destroying the Government by a Liberal-Conservative combination was absolutely lost. The chance had gone and the hope of a general election gone too. Mr. Garvin, looking to the future in black despair as he keened his dismal coronach, wrote : ' If the Labour Government is allowed to go on for another two years, they will do more injury to the common interest than can ever be repaired.'

A coalition of Liberal and Labour offered no remedy. ' Labour and Liberalism together on present lines are bound to fail in dealing with the national problem. Mr. Snowden confessed, if we understand him, that, owing to his huge deficit, his next Budget will make the situation worse.' In that sentence is revealed the real reason why Mr. Garvin wished to remove the Labour Government. He feared the taxation that a Labour Chancellor would impose.

The world was suffering from an economic blizzard, and the financial stability of every country was threatened. Great Britain could not escape. Indeed, the depression had already come and would get worse. As the gale increased, it would claim more victims. More and more people would be thrown out of work. That in turn meant a greater drain on the Unemployment Insurance Fund, already bankrupt. To meet this increased charge, there must be increased revenue, and that meant more taxation. A Labour Chancellor would not hesitate to make the rich help the poor. Indeed, he might even go so far as to reduce the interest on War Debt, put a tax on investment or attempt some other fancy artifice of Socialist finance. Who was to pay for the Depression ? Mr. Garvin was determined that it should not be the income-tax payer or the *rentier*. When Mr. Garvin referred to the ' common interest,' he meant the interest common to those two. If, therefore, vexatious taxation was to be avoided, the Labour Government must be destroyed. So, right through these articles came the

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murmur of the Catonian chorus : *Delundum est Labor*. This was the issue and never at any time, six months before the crisis or later, was there any other.

In February 1931 Mr. Garvin declared that the Government should be overthrown because it would not adopt a Conservative policy, and in August 1931, for that reason the Labour Government was broken. To prove that the policy proposed by Mr. Garvin for the National Government was a Conservative policy, the points have but to be set down. They were four. First, Reduction of Wages ; second, Drastic cutting of the Dole ; third, Reduction of Taxation ; fourth, Tariffs. This was essentially a Conservative policy.

This policy would definitely worsen the economic position of the working classes. Every section would be struck. The man in employment is hit if his wages are reduced. The unemployed man is affected if the dole is cut. Finally, MacDonald had on many platforms declared that the surest way to reduce the standard of life of the working classes was by imposing a Tariff. Here Liberal and Labour were absolutely at one.

What becomes of Garvin's vision of ' a determined majority of an awakened people ' ? Can it be that Mr. Garvin sees a great people awakened to the fact that they are getting too high wages and too bountiful insurance benefit ? Can he visualize the employed man demanding that his wages be reduced and the unemployed man handing back part of the dole ?

On the three questions of Unemployment Benefit, Low Wages, and Tariffs, MacDonald had made a definite pronouncement when, in a broadcast speech from Newcastle on 28 May 1929, he outlined his policy for the General Election. ' We do not,' he said, ' believe that a nation can flourish on the poverty of its masses. Empty pockets are not only poverty, but breed poverty. Our own backs and stomachs are still the most neglected, and yet the most profitable of all our markets. Those who believe that Safeguarding and Protection is any aid to the development of that market had better study protected countries, where wages are low, unemployment habitual, and poverty even worse than it is here. Work, first of all ; but if no work, maintenance.'

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Mr. Garvin knew that there was no appeal stronger than a national appeal, and that the name 'National' roused all the sentiments of patriotism. The assumption in calling this Right Bloc a *National Government* was a blatant impertinence. In this connection it is well to recall that MacDonald had vehemently denounced the claim that patriotism is only to be found in the Conservative Party. He often protested against their impudence in using the Union Jack as if it were a Party symbol.

A month passes. On 22 February Mr. Garvin appears again, not as a Sophist to the Lyceum to warn the people of their impending doom, but as an evangelist in the public forum to preach a new gospel of revolution. For a Conservative to propose a revolutionary change in the form of our political system demands some justification. If a desperate remedy is to be applied, the sickness must be desperate too. Mr. Garvin sets out to prove this. 'The country is passing through the gravest economic and social crisis through which the nation has ever passed since the industrial age began.' If the Party system and the impotent fatuity of all three factions are allowed to go on for another two years 'with their conventional game of mutual paralysis, they will do more injury to the common interest than can ever be repaired. They will wreak as much damage on our Imperial, industrial, financial, and social foundations as defeat in the War could have inflicted. They are doing what the Germans failed to do. We won the War by unity; the three-Party muddle is turning victory into disaster.' What aggravates Mr. Garvin is that this absence of unity, this split into three factions, only exists in Parliament. The people themselves, he would make out, are undivided.

'The paradox,' he declared, 'is unexampled in history. On one hand, a great people only requiring powerful leadership to be as great again as ever it was and possessing full means to restore and enhance its fortunes. On the other hand, three Parties, none of them representing a majority of the electorate, whose rival manoeuvres tend to the same end of weakening the national foundations for ever and reducing the British Empire to the shadow of a name.'

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The picture that Mr. Garvin wishes to set up in this pretentious paragraph is of a united people on one side, inspired by a common interest and waiting, waiting, waiting for a leader. This is a mischievous misrepresentation. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a nation united on political and economic questions. If this absurd picture of a waiting nation were true, there would be some justification for Mr. Garvin's characteristic captions: '*A Plague on your Parties*,' '*A Plea for a National Government*,' '*Party is not enough*.' These screaming slogans are in the true Garvin tradition—a tradition that derives from his great countryman, Swift. The creator of Gulliver, however, sent his observer into the Never-Never Lands far across the sea; Mr. Garvin finds types for his fantastic imagery at home in England. By this pompous flappedoodle he wishes to conceal the awkward fact that Parliament is but a replica of the country. At the General Election of 1929 the divisions were: Conservatives, 8,664,243; Labour, 8,362,594; Liberal, 5,300,947; Communist and other Parties, 311,333. It is, therefore, not one great people being hindered by a remnant. These figures show that there were more than fourteen million people not waiting for any leadership that he might suggest. While the enemy was at the gate in the Great War, politicians agreed to unite on the single question of repelling him. There was unity on that and that alone. On domestic questions, on questions of internal policy, there was as much difference as ever. Did Mr. Lloyd George cease to be a Liberal as Prime Minister of a Coalition or Mr. Arthur Henderson give up his Socialism when he entered the Cabinet? The analogy with the War which Mr. Garvin wished to draw is false and mischievous. To ask conflicting interests to combine is a cynical suggestion. It is as if the Atheist, the Pagan, and the Christian were asked to hold a solemn convocation to draw up a common creed, or as if the Brewer, the Publican, and the Prohibitionist were invited to draft a Licensing Bill.

Mr. Garvin's article contained arresting and impressive images. Patriotism, Great Emergency, Disaster, National Honour, etc. This is what is known in America as ballyhoo. It is essential. It is put over for what is known as creating an atmosphere. Garvin's real grievance was that the Labour

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Government had been bringing in the wrong Bills. He took strong objection to the Coal Mines Bill, the Trades Disputes Bill, the Unemployment Insurance Bill, and the Bill to raise the School Leaving Age. They were all Bills for the benefit of the working classes ; it was class legislation. What specially irritated Mr. Garvin was that the Liberals supported the principles involved.

The nation tends inevitably to divide itself into the two broad classes—'the Haves and the Have-nots.' This division might well appeal to Mr. Garvin, for it was the classification of one of his heroes, Disraeli. In publicly declaring that the people of England consisted of 'Two Nations,' the rich and the poor, Disraeli did more than make a true differentiation ; he displayed an extraordinary courage. It was a bold admission for a Conservative politician—even a Tory Democrat—and for ninety years his successors have been trying to explain it away.

Another Press publicist, Mr. Sidebottom, of the *Sunday Times*, wrote :

'Is it too late even now for an Economy bloc of Conservatives and Liberals? Apart from issues of foreign policy, all our domestic problems are now converging on finance. But the time for effective protest is gone when the expenditure has been sanctioned and the bill is presented. Unless there is a change in the present relations of Parties the Budget will find just the same divided counsels in the Opposition as now. The country is taking frightful risk. For a Labour victory at the next Election, with a prospect of four years of power, might, as things are now going, add an annual burden equivalent to the annual charge of the War. The Socialism that is formidable is no longer nationalization of private business concerns, but nationalization of profits in the form of taxation.'

These illuminating sentences reveal the real reason that lay behind the formation of the 'National' Government eighteen months later. They propose a combination of vested interests, definitely and ruthlessly designed to defeat the financial policy of the Labour Government. The proposal went no further at the time as far as the Parliamentary Parties were

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concerned, but it became effective in the committee of bankers and financiers which was formed in 1931. This organization went from strength to strength, and in the end achieved its triumphant purpose in destroying the Labour Government.

What made the article in the *Observer* of 22 February 1931 of sensational interest was that it contained the first public suggestion that the Labour Prime Minister might be willing to leave the Labour Party and join a 'National' Government. 'There is no reason,' wrote Mr. Garvin, 'why Mr. Ramsay MacDonald himself, if he cared, should not be the head of a "National" Cabinet including leaders of all Parties and groups.' After a high-sounding euphemistic prologue, the florid rhetoric of the argument slidders to this startling anticlimax. Stripped of all extraneous flummery, Mr. Garvin's proposal is that MacDonald resign as Labour Premier, that he form a new Government of the leaders of all three Parties, that the name 'National' be applied to it, that its programme be the Conservative programme. While the Labour and Liberal Parties were to surrender their principles, the Conservatives were to give up not a jot or tittle of their creed.

At the end of January the hope of the Conservatives was that the Liberals might join with them, and defeat the Labour Government on some vital issue in the House of Commons and so compel its resignation. Everything, therefore, at that time depended on Lloyd George, and Mr. Garvin flew a kite discreetly in the hope that the Liberal leader might consent to a Liberal-Tory alliance. There is no doubt that, if Lloyd George had been willing, he might, at that time, have been Prime Minister of a Coalition Government. The generous panegyric on the Liberal leader in the *Observer* may have been written to influence him in that direction. But Mr. Lloyd George was not to be bribed even by the prize of the Premiership. Nor could all Mr. Garvin's blarney bring him to join in the intrigue against the Labour Government. Indeed, he did the opposite. On the most vital question of the hour, unemployment, Lloyd George moved towards the Left, and wholeheartedly endorsed the Government's policy on that problem. On the next most important question, agriculture, he had nothing but praise for the vigorous way in which Dr. Addison was tackling it.

## MR. GARVIN AND THE 'NATIONAL' GOVERNMENT

The only real danger-point in the life of a minority government is when a vote of censure is moved by the Opposition ; defeat then means overthrow. In those emergencies, Mr. Lloyd George put behind the Labour Government the full weight of his prestige. To the delight and relief of the anxious members of the Government, he not only used his incomparable eloquence to denounce the Tory attacks in the House, but led triumphantly his contingent into the Government Lobby. Mr. Winston Churchill was wrong. The floor that separated the Liberal and Labour Parties in the House of Commons was not, after all, too broad, but Mr. Lloyd George's action made the gangway between Liberals and Conservatives completely impassable.

This decision of Mr. Lloyd George and his diminutive but determined coterie kept the Labour Government safe in the House of Commons. The only way, therefore, to end its dangerous administration was to persuade it to commit suicide 'to make a Tory holiday.' This suggestion would seem preposterous, until it is remembered that the Prime Minister of any Government holds the life of that Government in his hand. If the Prime Minister resigns, the administration comes to an end. Thus the problem was simplified by narrowing it to a single issue and that a personal one. As everything else had failed, would it be possible to induce MacDonald to resign and so destroy his Government ?

If that question had been put to the average Labour Member of Parliament in the spring of 1931, he would have regarded it as an insult to himself and a libel on his leader. He could not have been persuaded that MacDonald would be guilty of such black treachery as to break his own Government and join the enemy.

It must be admitted that, at first sight, the suggestion that MacDonald should be Prime Minister of a 'National' Government seemed ridiculous. Why should MacDonald's name be put forward as leader of a Government which included the opponents of his Party ? It was certainly not because his Tory sponsor admired or respected him. In the House of Commons he had often been treated with scornful contumely by his political opponents.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things in the political

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sphere at that time was the friendship of MacDonald with the chief host and hostess of the Conservative Party. It must have made the gods laugh to see the leader of the *sans culottes* in Belgravia, the champion of the proletariat dawdling down the primrose path of dalliance towards the Tory *salons* of Park Lane and Mayfair.

It was not as if MacDonald had been warning the country of his conversion to the Conservative policy of tariffs, of lower taxation, lower doles, and lower wages. On the contrary, he had denounced every item of it as not only ineffective but disastrous. It was not that MacDonald believed that there was no alternative to Tory policy. In speech after speech, he had declared that the Labour programme was the only possible policy and the one most urgently necessary to deal with the crisis which was then so rapidly approaching. Right up to July 1931, in public speeches, he declared that the success of the Labour Government was inevitable. Never, he said, had the Government's position been so stable and its prospects more bright. Thus it was not a case of a captain leaving a sinking ship, shattered from shot and shell. Such action might not be commendable, although in certain circumstances it might be excusable. But for MacDonald to be willing to hand the ship over to a pirate crew—indeed to be the pirate chief himself—is surely unprecedented in the history of political piracy.

How would Mr. Garvin himself, in his characteristic Swiftian idiom, depict the scene if he saw it from the opposite angle? He would tell of Athens surrounded by two hostile armies. After nearly two years, an agreement is reached, and one of the armies joins forces with the beleaguered garrison. Thus, revived and strengthened by these reinforcements, the city can hold out indefinitely. Suddenly, when all hope of taking the city by assault has failed and the investing army is in despair, an amazing message is secretly conveyed to the headquarters of the besiegers that the leader of the defenders is willing to surrender the city on an extraordinary condition—namely, that, in return, he be appointed leader of the enemy forces. He will do more. He will undertake to march out as if in triumph and, bearing the banners and shouting the battle-cries of his erstwhile enemies, join them in their attack on the city.



## *MR. GARVIN AND THE 'NATIONAL' GOVERNMENT*

As far as MacDonald was concerned, the proposal would be the consummation of his hopes. 'It would be one of the greatest opportunities ever opened to a statesman,' says Mr. Garvin enthusiastically. Mr. Churchill, with that intuitive insight into character which is one of the most conspicuous qualities of that erratic genius, said on a memorable occasion that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's great ideal was to be perpetual Prime Minister. To be Prime Minister in any government was a high honour, but to be Prime Minister in a government of all parties had been beyond his dreams.

Thus it was that, six months before the crisis, long before the 'drain of gold' had ever been dreamt of, or saving the pound spoken of, long before the publication of the May Report—at a time when the Labour Government was more secure and more stable than it had ever been and was promising to carry on indefinitely—the 'National' Government was planned. It is known now that it had no connection with the financial crisis, although that was exploited by the junta to their purpose. Indeed, when it was planned, Great Britain was deemed so secure that it was lending money to help the budgets of Germany and other foreign countries.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### *IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S ROOM*

When Snowden in 1929 was offered the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had said that he would rather not undertake it unless there was reasonable hope that the Labour Government would remain in office long enough to do something. It would take some time before the members of the Government really got going in the departments. In the early days of 1931 the Government had already achieved notable successes in the field of Home and Foreign affairs, and despite the darkening depression, was undoubtedly becoming stronger every day.

Thus it happened that while other Ministers were consolidating their positions, MacDonald was gradually sinking lower in the estimation of the Party. Ever since the meeting of the Parliamentary Party on 17 February 1931, the day following Snowden's sensational speech in the vote of censure debate, there had been a worsening of the relationship between the Party and MacDonald. That meeting was outstanding, for it marked the date when his alienation from the rest of the Party became definitely manifest to his supporters. It was then that he showed himself quite out of sympathy with the rest of the Party. Members were shocked to hear their leader defend, what was, in effect, the Tory policy that, in view of the depression, there should be at this time no increase of direct taxation, but that the economies necessary ought to be made at the expense of the social services, the poor and the unemployed. It was an attitude towards the unemployed which was directly opposite to the promises and policy which had been decided at every Party Conference. It was the first evidence of that strange antipathy, if not hostility, of MacDonald towards the unemployed, which seemed to develop as the weeks passed. This was an astonishing revelation and when Members

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thought of it afterwards, they recognized that this was only the premonitor of his subsequent apostasy. His isolation became more and more noticeable as time went on. He was painfully and constantly conscious of a growing antagonism to himself personally. This estrangement had begun years before on the extreme Left but the flash point of explosion was moving towards the more moderate elements. The trouble was definitely personal. The Government itself was growing in popularity. One thing alone enabled him to retain his position. Although the question was being talked of, there was no sign of an alternative leader. The well-known loyalty of Henderson and Snowden's financial policy prevented overtures being made to them.

To MacDonald, therefore, at this time, the scheme of a 'National' Government, with himself at the head, was particularly attractive. As it practically abolished the Party system, it removed the danger of defeat. In the circumstances, too, supersession was impossible. It would give him tremendous power and authority. In its last analysis, it came almost to dictatorship.

Quick to recognize the radiant possibilities of the project, he also foresaw the difficulties. He saw that the first step towards a 'National' Government was an agreement with the Conservatives. An intrigue of this kind must be conducted with the utmost secrecy. It is difficult, therefore, to fix the exact date for the first move.

To the great cartoonist, Low, must be given the credit of being the prophet who read the situation accurately. In December 1930 a cartoon by Low appeared in the *Evening Standard* with the caption: 'The unemployed question having produced a crisis, Mr. MacDonald forms a National Government.'<sup>1</sup> The picture shows Mr. MacDonald at the head of the Cabinet table, at which Mr. Baldwin also is sitting. In the background, apparently left out in the cold, are Snowden, Henderson, and Clynes.

It is certain that events moved quickly after Snowden's February speech. As early as the end of March, it became pretty well known that a 'National' Government was in contemplation. On 19 May 1931 a significant paragraph appeared in a London newspaper as follows:

'The whispering lobbies have for seven weeks past echoed

<sup>1</sup> See page 121.

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with the rumour that Mr. MacDonald was at last to achieve a cherished dream—that, at last, the day might dawn when he and Mr. Baldwin might sit, Arcadians both, upon the Treasury Bench.’

In his first speech as Prime Minister of the second Labour Government, MacDonald had suggested that the House should become a Council of State. The phrase became the standing joke of the session with the young Tories. A year after, on 18 June 1930, a debate on unemployment took place. In his speech MacDonald reverted to the Council of State idea. It was revealed then, that some weeks before, MacDonald had sought to put into effect this proposal of all parties working together, and had invited the co-operation of Baldwin and Lloyd George. The Liberal leader, on behalf of his Party, welcomed the proposal. Baldwin’s reply was equally definite and outspoken. He not only repudiated the suggestion, but proceeded to give conclusive reasons for doing so. He had no confidence in the political and economic policy of the Government, especially with regard to taxation, and he believed that a revival of industry could only be secured by the wide institution of a policy of safeguarding, and a system of preferential tariffs. Thus, the Conservative leader not only gave the reasons for rejecting MacDonald’s proposal, but in doing so indicated the terms on which he would be prepared to accept it.

In the famous February vote of censure debate, the Tory spokesman surprised everyone by appealing to the House to accept the despised policy of a Council of State. Now this was not a *volte-face*, for in the meantime many things had happened. The Council of State as originally proposed by MacDonald, merely meant that the other two parties should help the Labour Government in their difficulty. The Liberals had got some sort of an undertaking as to electoral reform, but there was nothing in it for the Tories. There were neither posts nor policy for them. It would be, to an extent, responsibility without power. The Tory leader would share the blame but get no reward of a place in the Government. It would be all kicks and no half-pence. Moreover, why should he help to prolong the life of a government whose political and economic policy he believed to be a positive danger to the

EVE-OF-THE-SESSION PARTY AT THE BORGHIAS'



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country. His one object as a Conservative was not to help, but to hinder and to destroy the Labour Government at the earliest possible moment.

But in the February debate the Tory mover of the vote of censure welcomed the Council of State proposal. Why then this change of front? The answer is easy. This was not the proposal so scornfully repudiated nineteen months before.

In the interval there had been conversations and negotiations. This was an invitation to an equal status. This was not an organization that would help Labour, but one that would and must overthrow it. The chrysalis Council of State had evolved into the glorious butterfly 'National' Government.

It is not known when MacDonald discussed the plan for a 'National' Government with Baldwin. It is not certain that he ever did. There was really no need. Indeed, it would be good diplomacy not to have Baldwin in the intrigue at all. In any case, apart from Baldwin, MacDonald had a sufficient number of contacts in the Conservative Party to make a direct approach to Baldwin unnecessary. Then MacDonald could surely take the acquiescence and support of the Tories for granted. They were getting something for nothing. They 'were out of office and looked likely to be in permanent opposition, at any rate as long as Labour and Liberal could be kept together in the division lobbies. Still, it is hard to believe that MacDonald would be able to refrain from talking over the project with the Conservative leader. There were several occasions on which he had the opportunity. MacDonald used to see Baldwin fairly often in the spring of 1931, but one day stands out particularly. Both at Downing Street in the morning and at the House of Commons in the afternoon, MacDonald had been in a very excited state. The secretaries—private and parliamentary alike—remarked on his agitation and impatience. It was always so when something big was afoot. There had been some irritating questions from both sides of the House. He could never suffer fools gladly, nor did he appreciate the value of the soft answer that turneth away wrath. He was particularly petulant when answering a question asked quite innocently by a Labour Member and rather muffed his answer to an awkward 'supplementary.' This gave rise to some ragging by the younger Tories.

## IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S ROOM

All this put him in a bad humour and when at five o'clock he called me into his room, he was pacing up and down like a caged lion. His agitation was so obtrusive that I sought to turn it off with a joke. I said I had thought of doing as they do in Ireland, of throwing in my hat first and seeing what reception it got, before venturing in myself. He smiled and then asked me to find Baldwin and ask him to come to the Prime Minister's room. The Conservative chief was sitting in the centre of a group in the Members' Smoking Room, chatting, listening, laughing, but mostly smoking. He cocked a quizzical eye at the messenger's whispered request. 'Now?' he asked. 'If you will,' said the messenger. He rose with a grunt and went to the Prime Minister's room to meet MacDonald, who, it was noticed even at that time, awaited his coming with some eagerness.

There was a grim humour in this strange *tête-à-tête*. The Prime Minister had turned his chair round with his back to the light, his face in the shadow. Baldwin sat on a low easy chair, facing MacDonald. The two men sat smoking—MacDonald, a cigarette; Baldwin, his famous pipe. Everything was set for an intimate exchange of views. There were several things that these two men had in common. Both had Highland origins. But there is little of the dreamy romantic about Baldwin. Indeed, he is by way of being a realist, although on certain memorable occasions he has shown himself an idealist as well.

MacDonald was sitting in the chair that Baldwin had occupied for five years. So strange a situation had developed that each was indispensable to the other. There was a strong fellow-feeling between them. They had one subject on which they could talk with understanding—the troubles of the political leader. Both were in danger of losing their leadership; both had been attacked by brilliant rebels. As Baldwin sat smoking, he had the measure quite accurately of the Labour Premier. The word 'slim' came into the vocabulary of the ordinary man about the time of the South African War, to describe the tactics of President Kruger. In appearance and in that rugged quality of independence, Baldwin resembles the famous Boer leader, and the similarity does not end there. Baldwin is slim—the quietest, cutest, slimmest politician of our time.

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How long did Baldwin take to sum up MacDonald? What did he know when he had done so? What are the characteristics of MacDonald that would strike Baldwin? He knew a good deal about MacDonald, beyond that which he had learned from his study of him across the floor of the House. Many of his friends were intimate with MacDonald. He knew of his social and political ambitions. He knew that MacDonald was out of sympathy with a great many of his Party; he had seen MacDonald day after day squirming under attacks from Maxton and from that redoubt of snipers that came to be known as 'The Mountain.' There was no hope in Labour disaffection. True there was revolt in the Labour Party, but it was against the leadership and held out no hope of Labour helping him. There was no chance of Labour accepting Tory Four-Square Gospel. There was, too, no hope of Liberal support. That door was shut when Lloyd George declared his support for Labour. Even if the impossible happened and the Labour Government were defeated in the House, there was no hope of winning in a General Election. In fact, an election, when the Conservatives were split three ways, would be a *débâcle*. He knew, also, that he would never have a chance of winning power on a purely Tory platform. Finally, he knew that a genuine, honest coalition was impossible, as Conservatism and Socialism were mutually destructive.

But what MacDonald offered him was no genuine coalition. He realized that the number of those who would support MacDonald would be small and that MacDonald must become a mere cipher owing to the strength of the Conservative section, as far as determining the policy of the new Government was concerned.

At this time Baldwin was having great trouble with his Party, both inside and outside the House of Commons. He was out with Churchill, Rothermere, Beaverbrook, and the Diehards. There was violent disagreement on the question of India. Worst of all the Baldwin-Must-Go Movement was strengthening every day.

Lastly, on personal grounds, and characteristically, Baldwin would put personal considerations last, it would be a great come-back for him. What a retort to his enemies who for years had been trying to hound him out of the leadership.



## IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S ROOM

In the original scheme of a 'National' Government, there was a ready-made Cabinet. The names suggested would have been a Ministry of all the talents and yet it would have been a heterogeneous collection of incompatible personalities: Snowden and Baldwin, Simon and Lloyd George, Mosley and MacDonald, Henderson and Churchill. The strategy of inserting these names is known in card-playing as finessing and in biology as protective coloration.

There was one name on the list, however, which gave rise to some misgiving in the minds of both the Prime Minister and Baldwin. Snowden, with his perfervid allegiance to Free Trade, might prove difficult; yet the help of the Chancellor of the Exchequer was indispensable. But Snowden was resigning from the House of Commons and could be relied upon not to make trouble until, at least, he was out of harm's way in the unassailable security of the House of Lords.

It may well be that Baldwin was not at that time a party to a plot to overthrow the Labour Government. Indeed, it would be characteristic Baldwinian tactics to be cautiously and discreetly non-committal. After all, the first executive act must come from MacDonald. All he needed to know was exactly where Baldwin stood. When he learned that the Conservative leader was friendly, it was up to the Prime Minister to make the running.

The Tory leader is fond of fairy tales. Here is an application of one that is apposite. Cinderella Baldwin sits solitary and disconsolate by the fire. The Ugly Sisters (Beaverbrook and Rothermere) have gone to the ball. Suddenly fairy godmother (MacDonald) appears with the coach ('National' Government) drawn by a team of beautiful 'rats.'

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

### ARCADES AMBO

Aloofness as a policy is practised by kings, dictators, and Prime Ministers. MacDonald's aloofness has often been remarked upon. Perhaps no Prime Minister, not even Asquith, Salisbury, Palmerston, or Peel, was so aloof as he. He carried this curious seclusion so far that, if he could avoid it, he never saw any of his own Party. This applied to members of the Cabinet as much as to members of the rank and file. But there was one exception to this rule. Mr. J. H. Thomas was the only member of the Labour Party who could break down MacDonald's aloofness. He was, in fact, MacDonald's closest associate. He was the only one who could, and did, walk into the Prime Minister's room unannounced and without a previous engagement. He was in the habit of thrusting aside the secretarial barrage and stalking into the Premier's presence without a by-your-leave. He used to have long parleys with the Prime Minister. No one sat oftener with MacDonald, no one sat longer and everything was held up while these lengthy confabulations proceeded. But Jim Thomas could as readily 'gate-crash' Buckingham Palace as 10 Downing Street and get away with it. The reason lies in the nature of the man. He is a favourite with everybody. In spite of disagreements, quarrels, inconsistencies, he is *persona grata* everywhere. Yet they were an incongruous couple: Thomas jolly, good humoured, vivacious, affable, a good mixer; MacDonald moody, morose, irritable, egocentric. Each was a fitting foil for the other, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*: Sunny Jim and Jim Dumps.

Thomas is a great raconteur, a prince of story tellers. He is at home at the great banquet where his brilliance as a witty after-dinner speaker has full scope. His 'biled shirt' and his fat cigar are the joke of the cartoonist. There are some who say that his mixing of his grammar and his manipulation of the

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'h' is deliberate. He had as private secretary the famous Eddie Marsh, a *littérateur* of international reputation, a brilliant classical scholar, a critic of the drama, a connoisseur of art, the translator of *The Fables of La Fontaine*.

To such a one would Thomas proffer the request: 'Look these reports over, Eddie, and give me the — gist.' There is the apocryphal story of Jim meeting a fellow member in the corridor and on telling him that he had 'an 'ell of an 'eadache' was recommended to try 'a couple of aspirates.' There is a story, too, that on the occasion of a great jubilee dinner, he was sitting next to the Chinese Ambassador. During the course of the dinner he noticed that the Ambassador's glass was empty, and pointing to it, he inquired: 'You likee more?' The Ambassador did not reply but went on with his dinner and Thomas, feeling the strain of carrying on conversation in pidgin-English too great, talked to his neighbour on the other side. Later in the evening the Chinese Ambassador was called upon to reply to a toast and, to Mr. Thomas's astonishment, he made a most excellent speech in perfect English. When the speech was over and the applause had died down, the Ambassador turned to Mr. Thomas and said: 'You likee speech?'

His great trade union, the National Union of Railwaymen, recognized Thomas's merits and value. They had successively raised him from organizer, assistant secretary, general secretary, president, and finally to political general secretary. No other trade union leader was so well known: no one has been more bitterly attacked. From all this, however, he arose smiling with a resiliency that no rebuffs could suppress. As a trade union leader Thomas has been abundantly successful. He has seen the railwaymen's union grow to one of the most powerful organizations of working men in the world. There is no doubt that he played a great part in getting wages increased, better conditions for his men, and the eight-hour day granted to the railwaymen. In return the railwaymen have shown their gratitude by lavishing gifts upon him. Even in his own union, however, he was not free from attacks. In fact for years the annual conference of the National Union of Railwaymen began with a brick and a vote of censure on Jim Thomas and ended with a bouquet and a vote of thanks.

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At conferences he was a brilliant chairman : alert, intelligent, with a remarkable grip of the business in hand, lightning in decisions, fair to minorities, tolerant to antagonists. As evidenced by his rapid rise in his trade union he was a born leader of men. He was anathema to the Lefts, but even they were tempted to fall under the spell of his geniality.

The General Strike brought a crisis in Thomas's career. His part with regard to the N.U.R. was not unlike that of MacDonald towards the Independent Labour Party during the War. When the N.U.R. unanimously supported it he acquiesced. To have done otherwise would have meant the end of his trade union career.

MacDonald held the same view of the War as those members of the Labour Party who joined the War Cabinet, but he was an I.L.P. Member of Parliament. To have broken with them at that time would have meant the end of his political career.

Thomas was the handyman of the Cabinet, ready for any job, with the adaptability of a Jack-of-all-Trades and the versatility of a One-Man Band. This chameleon versatility and his abounding energy, added to his friendship with MacDonald, brought him special consideration when the great offices of State came to be allocated.

When the first Labour Government was being formed he refused the post of Secretary of State for Air because it was not a first class Secretaryship. He seemed to have been somewhat worried as to what job he should take. He had been looking up precedence and he thought the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies was higher than the War Office or the Admiralty. He declared that if he could not have the Colonies he would demand the Home Secretaryship. He got the Colonies.

When the second Labour Government was being formed Thomas was in difficulties again. He felt that his prestige demanded higher recognition than a mere Secretaryship of the Colonies. This time he had set his eyes on the very distinguished post of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. MacDonald was anxious to give him the appointment, especially to circumvent Henderson, the obvious choice. MacDonald's plan for Henderson was that he be given the new post of Minister of Employment. So anxious was he to prevent Henderson getting the Foreign Secretaryship, that he suggested

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taking that post himself, and holding it jointly with the Premiership, as he had done in 1924. In view of this Thomas announced his willingness to accept the post of Secretary for the Dominions. It should be understood that Thomas had agreed to this on the understanding that MacDonald was taking the Foreign Office. This was obviously an unsatisfactory arrangement as the Premier holding the double office had not worked well in 1924. MacDonald knew well that there was no one better qualified for the Foreign Secretaryship than Henderson, and pressure having been brought to bear on him, he was induced to give him the post. Thomas, feeling that he had been let down both by MacDonald and Henderson, finally agreed to accept the post of Lord Privy Seal and Minister for Employment. As Lord Privy Seal and Director General of Employment schemes he was a kind of Great Panjandrum, a Lord-High-Everything. His special business was Unemployment, but he had associated with him Lansbury, Johnston, and Mosley. It would be difficult to find a more heterogeneous committee. Each was a personality, each with marked individuality, with strong views, each with the force and character to press his views with dogmatic assertiveness. *Quot homines, tot sententiae*. It was utterly impossible to get this discordant quartette to sing in harmony. They wouldn't even sing the same song. A very clever Low cartoon in the *Evening Standard* at the time depicted J. H. Thomas, the butler, 'taking the three Alsatians out for a run,'<sup>1</sup> and being dragged along behind his lively charges. It hit off the absurd situation as only that incomparable artist could.

There is an old Greek story that tells of Sisyphus, who for his wickedness during life, was given the task of rolling a huge block of marble up a hill. That was the task that was put upon the Lord Privy Seal and his committee. They had to move the great stone of unemployment up the hill. Thomas wanted to call in the aid of the capitalists, whose profit-making system was responsible for putting the stone there, to come and help him to remove it. Lansbury and Johnston believed it was a public works job. They would construct a road to the top and get the stone taken to the summit, while Mosley's plan was to put a charge of high explosive below the stone

<sup>1</sup> See page 49.

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and remove it and everything else in the neighbourhood. In the end Thomas quarrelled with Mosley. Johnston and Addison later on showed how the job should be done, but both were out of office before they could get a chance to do it.

In May 1931 there were rumours that Snowden, who had been very ill in the early part of the year, was thinking of retiring from the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. In his *Autobiography* he makes an amazing revelation that affected both Thomas and MacDonald. He says :

‘ Mr. MacDonald told me that Mr. Thomas was pressing him persistently to give him the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer when it became vacant.’<sup>1</sup>

Now, having regard to all the facts this is a most remarkable disclosure. Indeed, if it were not made by Snowden, it would be quite unworthy of credence. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is in precedence, the second Minister of the Crown. His is a post of great authority and great power.

Both MacDonald and Thomas were hostile to Snowden, while the relationship between MacDonald and Thomas was one of the closest friendship. That MacDonald should disclose the confidences of his friend Thomas to his enemy Snowden, was surely a most astounding thing.

It was generally believed that the setting up of the ‘ National ’ Government was an affair of extreme suddenness and urgency. It was understood to be a hasty improvisation in the month of August 1931, to meet an unexpected emergency. The fact is that in the month of June the Lobby journalists knew definitely that arrangements had already been made to set up a ‘ National ’ Government ; the time was known, too, and was given as early autumn ; even the names of those who were to be in it were bruited about. It was known that Thomas was to be in the Cabinet of the ‘ National ’ Government.

It can readily be understood that these facts would have been first class front-page news. That they did not appear in the Press was due to the loyalty of the Lobby journalists to the tradition, that confidences received there are never betrayed. It was no surprise to the Press, therefore, to find when the names of the new Cabinet were announced some months later, that Mr. J. H. Thomas was Secretary of State for the Dominions and Colonies.

<sup>1</sup> *An Autobiography*, by Philip, Viscount Snowden, p. 924.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

### *LLOYD GEORGE AND MACDONALD*

Ramsay MacDonald and Lloyd George: how did they regard each other? What were the reactions of these two notables? No two figures have been more celebrated these last two decades than they. This is not to compare the stellar stability of Lloyd George for well nigh fifty years with the comet flare of Ramsay MacDonald during twenty. During the decade that began with the outbreak of war, Lloyd George was the foremost man in all the world. In those years, he won a place in public esteem that was not only supreme, but, despite recent unworthy disparagements of meaner minds, absolutely permanent. MacDonald's rise came later. His was a rocket flight to fame, a freak of luck, as, unlike Lloyd George, he had no rivals in his Party. It was so sudden and held no promise of continuance.

It might have been expected that those two men, both of Celtic origin, both born in poverty, both politicians and professing liberal opinions, would have developed a close friendship. This was not so, for they were temperamentally opposites. Just before the War, MacDonald was closely associated with prominent Liberals. He and Lloyd George often met; but, after that period, the personal relationship between them became more and more strained. Lloyd George's demeanour towards MacDonald in the House remained the same as it was to every other Member—that is to say, a friendly, approachable geniality. He had never attacked MacDonald during the time the Labour Government was in office. Indeed, in a very important debate, when the Tories were launching a strong attack on the Government on the question of unemployment, Lloyd George went out of his way to stand by MacDonald and to speak on his behalf words of encouragement and appreciation:

‘I beg the Government not to be too nervy and jumpy

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when the City of London threatens. Do not let the Government run away the moment a few volleys are fired from the City of London. It may save them trouble for a short time, but no progressive Government can survive long under the protection of the white flag. I ask the Prime Minister to go on ; that is what this motion means. He had a very fine vision—I am not referring to it in order to taunt or mock him—when he put before the electors of this country the vision of the city of God planted on a hill. It was a fine idea. At the moment he is beginning to lay the foundation stone. I beg of him not to be deterred by the fact that he is told that there are no lots available because the site is occupied by the City of London. What is needed to deal with a big situation is a big heart. Let him go forward boldly and we should be delighted to support him. It is a great opportunity to put a multitude of things right that need it. If the Government goes forward to do that they will lead this nation through to prosperity and contentment for all classes of people.'

On the other hand, how did MacDonald treat Lloyd George? I had an opportunity of learning this on one occasion which I shall never forget. By a strange and sudden lapse of that vigilant caution which has been so habitual with MacDonald as to have become instinctive, he gave me a glimpse of his mentality. For a moment, the mask slipped, and I saw the emotions that lay behind the strange obsession that inspired his hostility towards the Liberal leader. It was during an important debate when the Tory Opposition was moving a vote of censure on the Labour Government. As Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, I had been informed, as was the custom, of the time at which Mr. Lloyd George would intervene in the debate, and I took care to inform the Prime Minister. Meanwhile I saw to it that he had no engagement that would prevent his being in his place on the Treasury Bench to hear the Liberal leader's speech. I happened to be in the House when I saw Lloyd George rise, and I immediately hurried to the Prime Minister's room to remind him. He was writing at his table when I burst in upon him.

"That's L.G. up," I cried excitedly. A speech from Lloyd



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George is a notable occasion. The Prime Minister did not raise his head, but muttered indifferently "Lloyd George?" He kept on writing. "Yes, he has just got up." Then, not to miss a word, I hurried back to the Chamber, expecting the Prime Minister to follow at his leisure. The incomparable spell-binder, the artist of rhetoric, was putting everybody under the enchantment of his matchless skill. The House was packed. It was hopeless attempting to get to my own seat, and I sat down on the lowest step of the gangway, in front of the orator, literally at the feet of Gamaliel. I was just passing into the fascination of his eloquence when, looking along to my left, I was surprised to see that MacDonald was not in the House. Regretfully I got up and set off to find him. On the way to his room I found the precincts deserted, for everybody was in the Chamber. Even the doorkeepers kept the doors ajar to hear the better. I could hear the shouts of delighted laughter coming from the House. I could hear, too, Lloyd George from the Chamber, as I passed down the long Lobby; I could not help noticing the silver sweetness of the soft Welsh voice, as it rose and fell in persuasive periods.

When I reached the Prime Minister's room, he was still sitting alone, writing. "Lloyd George is up," I said again. He did not lift his head, but said shortly: "I'm not coming in." "Oh, surely. You'll have to come in." "I'm not coming in," he snapped.

I was shocked at the discourtesy to a great public figure, and tried again. "The House is crowded. L.G. is in great form. He has the House in his hand. He's making a marvellous speech. You must come in." MacDonald went on writing. I pulled a chair over to the table and sat down to reason with him. I appealed to him.

"Look here," I said, "you simply must come in. Lloyd George is the leader of a Party. He has been Prime Minister. It would be very discourteous if you stayed away. Tactless, too. He knows that you are here. He saw me leave the House just now. He'd know that I was coming for you. Baldwin's in his place; everybody's in but you. Lloyd George is attacking the Tories. It's a great scene. You must come in. Our boys are cheering him."

The Prime Minister stopped writing and shot a question

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at me sharply. "Are our fellows cheering him?" "Yes," I answered, "they're applauding heartily. You see Lloyd George is talking right up our street."

With an impatient gesture, he jumped up and turned on me angrily. "Our fellows mustn't do that. You know they shouldn't applaud that fellow. They mustn't do it. Tell them they mustn't do it!" Jerking his hands irritably, he walked towards the window and threw himself down on the couch. I stood for a moment, astonished at his vehemence. I saw, too, the reason for his shabby incivility. His vivid imagination had boded forth the scene at that moment taking place in the House. Cicero was dominating the Senate. I had often noticed his irritation and resentment when any Liberal speaker was cheered from Labour benches, but I never thought that his jealousy would drive him to tactless and flagrant discourtesy. It is an invariable custom for the Leader of the House to be in his place when the leader of one of the other Parties is speaking. That this may be arranged conveniently, it is usual for the leader who intends to speak to send word of his intention to the other leaders and to inform them at what time he proposes to 'catch the Speaker's eye.' So strictly is this rule observed that, if by any chance a leader cannot come in to hear the speech or has to leave before its conclusion, he always sends a polite note of apology.

MacDonald was annoyed and irritated at the Labour Members' spontaneous tribute to Lloyd George, and they cheered because they were getting from him the fearless fighting speech that they should have had from their own leader, but never received.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

### *A SHAM FIGHT IN THE COMMONS*

*Conticuere omnes, intentique ora tenebant !*

Although the project to set up a 'National' Government had been planned long ahead, it had, of course, to be kept secret. If it had been known, the whole scheme would be wrecked. The essence of the plan was that the 'National' Government was an improvisation which had to be set up hastily and quite unexpectedly to meet a sudden grave emergency. The amazing thing is that a secret of such magnitude and importance should have been so well kept. In the nature of things it was impossible that the secrecy should be absolute. In fact, one gentleman in an expansive moment of garrulous hilarity, talked of it in the Lobby. In the House of Commons, too, one ex-Liberal Minister chaffed another ex-Liberal Minister about the post he would have in the new Government. Otherwise few were initiated outside the chosen people, the blessed spirits elect. Now, premature disclosure through the untimely talkativeness of those 'in the know' was not the only danger that threatened the secrecy of the coalition scheme. The other danger was most alarming and had in it the element of absurd comedy. It came, in this instance, from the House of Commons itself and arose, not from locquacity, but from muteness. In that great assembly on 20 July 1931 there was enacted one of the funniest farces ever staged at Westminster. The fact that over it all was the element of danger, the danger of exposure, added piquancy to the affair. What lay behind the comedy was the fact that, when it took place, complete agreement on the setting up of the 'National' Government had been reached between the leaders. Nothing now remained but to wait for zero hour. But the interval was awkward. Parliament was sitting. The Tory Party was

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supposed to be fighting the Labour Party. They cannot, dare not, be told that behind the scenes a truce had been called, that high up between certain members of the hierarchy of both parties, there is amity and concord. Baldwin is placidly smoking the calumet of peace. With MacDonald, he has closed, so to speak, the doors of Janus. But in the waiting period it is necessary to keep up a show of opposition. The ordinary rough and tumble of Party fighting developed into mere shadow boxing as far as the Tory leader was concerned. As days went by and the Tory Front Bench could do nothing but be whimsically humorous in their speeches, there arose murmurings in the rank and file of the Tory forces. Why were they not being led forward into battle ?

*' Those behind cried " Forward,"  
And those in front called " Back." '*

An Opposition that does not really oppose is a strange phenomenon. An Opposition whose leaders do not want to be successful in an attack on their enemies, is stranger still. Yet to defeat the Labour Government at this stage would spoil everything. The supreme essential of a ' National ' Coalition Government was that all parties must be in it : Labour, Tory, and Liberal, each represented by their leaders. That meant that the key position was held by MacDonald as leader of the Labour Party. But he must be the leader at the time when the change-over took place, as it was only as leader of the Labour Party that he could be asked to form a Coalition Government. If by any chance he were removed from the leadership before he became Prime Minister of the new Government, the plan would be wrecked. The Labour Government could only be defeated on a direct motion of censure. The obvious course, therefore, for those who proposed setting up a National Government was to avoid any such motion. That was all right as far as the leaders were concerned, but what about the rank and file. They could not be told the reason why the Labour Government must not be defeated. This put the Tory leaders on the horns of a dilemma. To ban the moving of a motion of censure would be awkward. So the only way was to take steps to prevent the motion being successful.

Now there was one subject, unemployment insurance, on

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which a motion of censure had a chance of success. It was the only subject on which there was any hope of bringing the Liberals and Tories into the same Lobby. It was the real bone of contention in the motion of censure debate in February, when the Labour Government only escaped defeat by Snowden's sensational climb-down. Not only was there a reasonable hope that some at least of the Liberals would join them, but there was a real chance of getting Labour support as well. Labour was badly split on this issue at that time. The I.L.P. and the malcontents of the extreme Left had fought the Government during an all-night sitting of nineteen and a half hours, the previous week. It is strange and significant that on that occasion not a single Tory joined in the attack on the Government or voted with the rebels in the Lobby.

But the Tory hierarchy tactfully manœuvred their revolting supporters clear of that subject. It was too dangerous, it might be successful ! But they had to allow them a motion of censure. They therefore gave them one that was as harmless as an old shoe thrown to a pup to chew upon. The subject was one on which a deep and definite Party line was drawn. The motion declared that the Labour Government had lost the confidence of the country because they had not made farming pay as they had promised. While it was a genuine die-hard Tory motion, they could not have chosen a worse one if the hope was to defeat the Government. It raised the bitterest Party conflict and forced Liberal to join with Labour in denouncing the tyranny of landlordism and the starvation wages of the farm workers. If the motion chosen did not show a nice perception or a wise discrimination, it did show a sincerity and an enthusiastic optimism. These unofficial Conservative Members were obviously in earnest. They were defying their leaders and seemed anxious to defeat the Government. Their keenness may be gauged by the fact that nearly two hundred private Members signed the motion.

Now motions of censure are always important and to a minority government they may be critical. It is an axiom in the House of Commons that anything may happen and he is reckless who would foretell its decisions. If this motion of censure had been carried the Labour Government would have been thrown out and the Conservatives might have had a

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chance of putting their own policy into practice as the Government of the country. On this vital question, however, not one Conservative leader was willing to take a hand in the fight. The spectacle was one of complete farce. It was long-range firing by the Opposition, over the heads of their own Front Bench.

Mr. Tom Johnston, speaking for the Government, took up, point by point, the case put forward. He had a complete answer to all the questions raised and showed that although the Government had not had much time they had achieved a revival in this great basic industry and had outlined far-reaching plans for further development in the future.

The debate that followed was like the engagement at Inkerman, a soldiers' battle. No Front Bench Tory took part, nor indeed was there a speech from a Tory of any importance. There seemed to have been an understanding, tacit or otherwise, to 'lay off the Government' and that if there was to be an attack at all it must be in conformity with the real spirit of pantomime, not with bludgeons but with bladders. One ex-Minister, however, defied the silence ban. It was Lord Wolmer, the young Tory rebel, who threw the monkey-wrench into the machinery. He is the heir of the Earl of Selborne and belongs, by birth and upbringing, to the most exclusive section of the Tory Party. He had been Assistant Postmaster in the Baldwin administration. Becoming rather unpopular for his extreme reactionary views, Baldwin discarded him and banished him to the limbo of lost reputations. A member of considerable competence and courage he carried on a flank attack on his former colleagues. He dared even to attack Baldwin, who will never forgive him for calling him a 'sentimental Liberal.' In the independence of an unofficial bench beyond the jurisdiction of the ex-Premier, he could with impunity attack the covering wing over the Government, put up by his former leader.

The debate was carried on, as far as the Tories were concerned, by landlords and the sons of landlords, the heirs of earldoms and ex-guardsmen. It ranged the wide world. One member told a horrible tale about a tick which had been found in a piece of Russian butter, another waved a loaf in the air and asked members to admire its beautiful whiteness. So the

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debate on that warm afternoon in the vitiated air of the House of Commons, moved on languidly as a dromedary, dreary and drowsy.

There was a startling awakening when Lloyd George took the floor. To him it was a gala day and he was as happy as a winner at a flower show. Members crowded in to hear him, attracted like filings to a magnet. No wonder, for the most distinguished Member of the British Parliament, the world famous orator, was addressing the House. No one willingly misses a speech by Lloyd George, even Tory leaders being soundly trounced. From him they take their correction mildly and kiss the rod.

He dominated the debate. Standing right in the centre of the House, the only place visible from both the Press Gallery and the Members' Gallery, the best illumined point, he stood clear as if a spotlight had singled him out against the red of the carpet and the dark green of the benches. He was a picturesque figure that filled the eye. He was a man full of vigour and thrilled with animation and energy. He knew the old adage that the best form of defence is to attack, and he was attacking as only he could do.

'Two hundred rank and file,' he cried in gleeful banter, 'and not a single leader! I understand that not a single leader of the Party means to speak, unless Lord Wolmer has a claim to that rank. This is a charge of the Light Brigade, but it is not war, and it is not magnificent.'

This was a most devastating attack on the Conservative leaders for not stating their policy. Rarely had the Commons heard such a display of the lighter side of oratory.

Seated on the Front Opposition Bench, not three yards from the Liberal orator was Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, and Sir Thomas Inskip. They sat 'domes of silence,' motionless as the Trafalgar Square lions, as harmless, as imposing, and as mute. Their presence there that day was merely formal *Cum tacent clamant*. Their silence was eloquent. In fact they were showing that example which is better than precept. They would not join in criticism of the Government. These three sat determined, like the three admonitory monkeys of Buddha, to 'Speak no evil : See no evil : Hear no evil'—of the Labour

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Government. Baldwin, looking pleased as a film star making a personal appearance at a *première*, with folded arms, sat low on the Bench, cocking occasionally a quizzical but appreciative eye as the Welsh orator scored a hit. He, too, like his friendly antagonist, was enjoying himself.

Seated beside him was Mr. Neville Chamberlain, his aquiline features fixed in a look of cold scorn that seems habitual to him when an opponent is speaking. When Mr. Tom Johnston told of the 500 per cent increase since the Empire Marketing Board began to boost home and Empire butter, Mr. Chamberlain interrupted with a quick question: 'Is there any distinction between home and Empire butter?' That, and the words: 'It is rather important,' was the sole vocal contribution of the ex-Minister of Health, to the discussion of a motion on a subject closely associated with that department. In his taciturnity, however, he was observing a vow of silence.

Conspicuous, too, beside him, when Mr. Lloyd George was speaking, was Sir Thomas Inskip, long and round and limp, he leaned against the bench, lethargic as Ludham's dog, that leaned against the wall to bark. The golden voice of Lloyd George rose and fell in harmonious cadences. The day was hot and Sir Thomas shirked the concentration on a reasoned argument. His mind wandered elsewhere, mayhap, he pictured himself in a fortnight's time skipping blithely across the golden sands of Wigtownshire. As he dreamed, a cherubic smile flitted across his homely, friendly features. Quick as thought Lloyd George brought the smiling dreamer back to earth. He sensed derision in the grin and said so. Sir Thomas rose at once. 'I hope the right hon. gentleman will not accuse me of any discourtesy if I find his speech interesting.' A neat turning of the blow that the Liberal Leader appreciated. 'The hon. and learned gentleman,' he said, 'is the last man I would accuse of discourtesy.' A sentiment which every Member of the House would endorse.

That vindictive extenuation, characteristically courteous, was all the light and leading that this great lawyer could give to the debate. The bridle on his tongue, too, was in fulfilment of a pledge to be speechless.

The motion was discussed for eight hours and during all that time no speaker had uttered a word of criticism of the Prime



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Minister, nor was there a hint of censure of him from any part of the House. In the whole debate he was never even referred to. MacDonald had evidently been given the privilege of sanctuary. He was as immune from attack on that day as if he were already a true-blue bona fide member of the Primrose League.

The conduct of Mr. Baldwin was right. It was a time, not for censure but for commendation. It was a time for rejoicing, not for blame. Was it a time to reproach MacDonald when in a very short time he would be one of themselves? Here was a brand, indeed a quondam firebrand, plucked from the burning. It was certainly not a time to turn the prodigal son from the door, but rather to kill the fatted calf.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

### *THE SEVEN POWER CONFERENCE*

**A**fter the Great War, Germany had to pay large sums to the victorious allies. She had lost large slices of valuable territory with their populations. She had been deprived of vast resources of coal and iron, and, in addition, her mercantile marine was confiscated. Unlike France, Germany is not a self-supporting country and had to import from abroad food-stuffs for her people and raw materials for her industries. The only possible hope for Germany was to reconstruct her industries shattered by the War—and, by a great reduction of costs of production, surmount the tariff walls raised against her. To do this, money was required ; large credits had to be obtained somewhere. There is always credit available if the security is good and the rate of interest is high enough. Germany borrowed money from British financiers at as high as eight per cent. In addition to interest on these loans for industrial reconstruction, Germany had to pay interest on Reparations. This money, too, was borrowed, and the indebtedness to America and Britain kept mounting up. The speculative boom in America in 1928 gave American investors a more profitable market for their money at home, and so the flow of credits to Germany was stopped. When the economic blizzard hit the world, Germany was right out in the open. Disaster stared her in the face. Unable to get more money from America, Germany turned to Britain and eagerly offered high interest for short-term credits. As it happened, owing to the trade slump, British bankers had a large amount of money lying idle in their banks. Much of this money was lent to Germany and to Austria.

In spite of these temporary accommodations, Germany was rapidly drifting to disaster. In 1931, short and long-term loans were increasingly being withdrawn from Germany. In

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the first seven months of 1931, the withdrawals of short-term funds alone amounted to £150,000,000.

The cloud, however, burst first in Vienna. On 18 June 1931 the great Austrian Bank, the Credit Anstalt, was about to close its doors. Its losses were over £4,000,000. The Bank of England came to the rescue with a loan of £4,400,000. A loan from Paris had been rejected, because it was offered on such political terms that Austria could not accept. Then the danger point moved from Vienna to Berlin. The German banks ceased business. The Bank of England and the other great banks had to come to the rescue of the Reichsbank. This weakened the credit of the Bank of England abroad to the extent of perhaps another £5,000,000. German payments of about £50,000,000 due in London were temporarily frozen.

On 20 June, President Hoover, with full knowledge of the emergency financial situation in Europe and in view of the world-wide depression, proposed postponement during one year of all payments on Government debts, reparations, and relief debts, both principal and interest, but not including obligations to Governments held by private parties. The estimated cost of this to the United States Budget was £50,000,000. This act of President Hoover brought the British Government into the business. Mr. Snowden, on 24 June, announced in the Commons his acceptance, on behalf of the Government, of President Hoover's proposals, and indicated that it would cost the British exchequer £11,000,000 during that year.

In spite of all this, Germany's drift to disaster continued. At midnight on 15 July, the situation became critical. It seemed as if Germany might be plunged into a financial crisis unequalled since the wildest days of the inflation period. If Germany crashed, no one in London, Paris, or New York could declare with confidence that they would escape the abyss.

The decision of the British Cabinet to call an international conference in London was as a light in the darkness. In calling such a conference to deal with an urgent international problem, the Labour Government was acting in accordance with one of the chief articles in their faith. Ever since its

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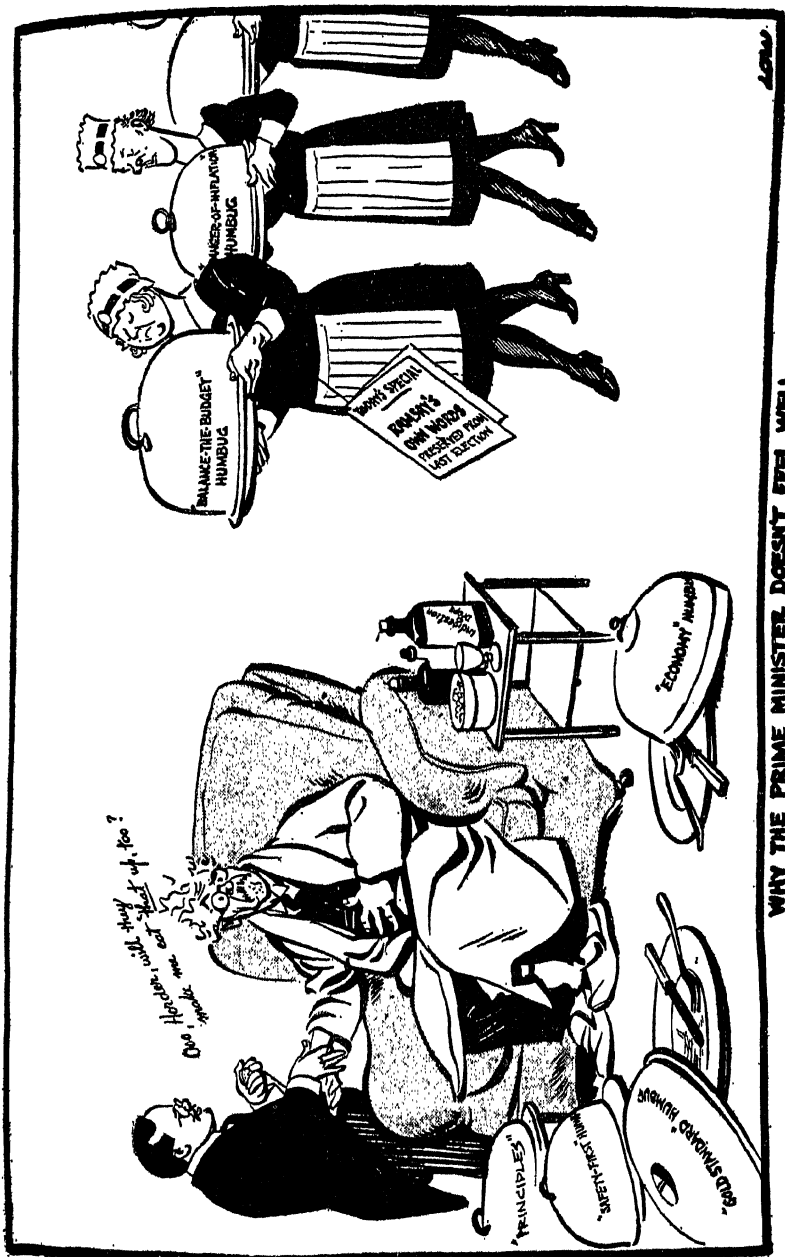
foundation, the Labour Party has stood for open diplomacy—open agreements, openly arrived at. That meant, when put into practice, just such a conference as the Seven Power Conference, when all the States interested or affected should meet together and talk over their difficulties. If the holding of the Conference was in accordance with Labour policy, the manner was not. There were no newspaper reporters, and the Conference was held in the strictest secrecy.

Once it was agreed to hold such a conference in London, the only possible choice for Chairman was MacDonald. Of the seven chief delegates only two had the rank of Prime Minister, and, for obvious reasons, it was impossible to choose M. Laval.

On 20 July 1931 the Seven Power Conference was held in London. The German delegates had already been to Paris, conferring with the French Ministers, and, although nothing definite was accomplished there except mutual expressions of goodwill, the air was considerably cleared for this Conference. The French had played their usual delaying tactics and, for a long time, seemed to hesitate whether they should accept the British Government's invitation. Realizing that it would be impolite to refuse, they ultimately consented to come to London.

A unique feature of the Conference was the presence of two American delegates, not only as spectators, but as active participants armed with authority on behalf of the United States. They were Mr. H. L. Stimson, Secretary of State, and Mr. Andrew Mellon, Secretary to the Treasury, who afterwards became Ambassador to the Court of St. James's. There was also Dr. Brüning, the German Chancellor, and Dr. Curtius, the German Foreign Minister. The French delegates were the world-famous Briand, Foreign Secretary, and M. Laval, Prime Minister. Signor Grandi, Italian Foreign Minister, represented Italy; M. Matsudaira, the Ambassador, was Japan's delegate; M. Renkin, Prime Minister, and M. Hymans, Foreign Minister, represented Belgium. MacDonald presided. Representing Great Britain with him were Henderson, Foreign Secretary, and Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

After extending, in the name of the Government and the whole British nation, a cordial welcome to the delegates,



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the Prime Minister stressed the importance and purpose of the Conference. He said :

‘The present moment may be one of the turning-points in the history of the world for good or ill. If we cannot find a solution of the present crisis, no one can foretell the political and financial dangers which will ensue. If we can find such a solution, it will be a striking proof of the growing effectiveness of international co-operation.’

As every sacrifice by the German people was unavailing, the German Government had felt bound to declare in June that they could go no farther and that they would have to use their right to declare a postponement of their liabilities under the Young Plan, unless the situation improved. That had alarmed the foreign lenders, on whose support Germany had been largely dependent during the past six years, and withdrawals of short-term credits had ensued on a very large scale. Matters in Germany had gone from bad to worse.

‘By 18 June,’ proceeded MacDonald, ‘the position appeared almost hopeless, when the whole face of the world was changed in half an hour by the dramatic announcement of President Hoover’s offer.’

‘The task of the Conference was,’ said MacDonald, ‘to restore the confidence of the foreign investor in Germany.’ Clearly the problem had both political and financial sides, but the mind of the Conference was to be concentrated on the latter. He had no illusions as to the difficulty of the task.

He had no doubt of the inherent strength of the German economy, provided that it had the capital resources that it required. It was for this purpose that President Hoover proposed a suspension for a year of all debts and reparations. That represented for Germany a very real and important relief. It might not prove to be sufficient ; that was a point that could be examined later.

The first plenary session of the Conference was on 21 July 1931. The delegates gathered in the beautiful Locarno Room of the Foreign Office. MacDonald presided. His introductory speech was on the lines of one that he had made the previous evening in his room at the House of Commons

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when welcoming the delegates to London. It was persuasive, conciliatory, hortative, and platitudinous. Then he called on Dr. Brüning, the head of the German delegation, to put the case for Germany to the Conference. The German Chancellor was a tall, handsome man, with typically Teutonic features. His brow indicated scholarship and culture, his eyes intelligence and good humour, and his chin firmness and resolution. There was the air about him of good-natured friendliness that drew his hearers to sympathetic attention. His speech was an earnest and eloquent appeal on behalf of his country. He gave a short and comprehensive survey of the position of Germany. He put his case with an impressive moderation and a convincing sincerity.

As is the custom when diplomatists have to make important statements at international conferences, he spoke in his mother tongue, although he has a remarkable knowledge of English. Dr. Brüning's powerful appeal lost nothing in the translation, for the interpreter was not only competent but brilliant, and put life and dramatic force into the English version. A very depressing story Dr. Brüning had to tell. Surely never before at an international conference was such a tragic story of misfortune and despair told by any European nation. The feeling after the German advocate had sat down was evidently that no more need be said. The case had been proved. Every nation but one believed that. It seemed that all that remained was to find the best way of helping Germany.

The next speaker was Mr. Stimson, the United States Secretary of State. He sat on the extreme right of the Chairman. He was end man at that side, and his *vis-à-vis* across the room was the Japanese representative. Mr. Mellon, an old, benevolent, white-haired gentleman, sat by Mr. Stimson's side. He did not speak a word during the Conference, but just sat quietly looking on, and his colleague would now and then murmur a word in his ear.

Mr. Stimson's speech was a complete acceptance of the German case and a generous offer to help. 'We won't let Germany down,' he said in effect. Speaking with full authority for the United States, he declared that he could guarantee that they would not withdraw any short-term credits from Germany. Dr. Brüning looked his gratitude. Then came the

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turn of Great Britain. As it was purely a financial question, Snowden put the British point of view. He had gained a world-wide reputation for his consistent obstinacy. The French, after their experience of him at the Hague Conference on War Debts, had some reason for dubbing the British Chancellor 'Monsieur Non-Non.' Snowden said that he appreciated and commended the very benevolent action of America, but regretted that he was not in a position to go so far as Mr. Stimson. He pointed out that the British Government had no effective control over the British banks, not even over the Bank of England. He could not dictate their policy. The Bank of England was a private institution. He could not control either the giving or withdrawal of credits.

Many of the credits to which Mr. Stimson referred were held by private institutions, but the difference between Mr. Stimson's position and Mr. Snowden's was that those American financiers had given him power to speak for them, and so the Secretary of State was merely informing the Conference what the American policy was. Willing to help was the British Chancellor, very willing, but he did not know what he could do, and he was afraid that he could not do much.

This 'non-possumus' speech of the British representative, coming after the emphatic declaration of the American delegate, rather damped the enthusiasm of the delegates. It was a fitting prelude to the speech that followed, when the voice of France was heard. That voice was not the voice which all wished to hear. The French delegation included Briand. The greatest orator in all Europe sat silent. Was this the great Briand, the darling of France, the speaker who had swayed great assemblies with the magic spell of his golden voice and the spell of his matchless eloquence? The soul of an actor, the passion and pathos of a great tragedian had been his. Day after day the Conference sat, but he never uttered a word. Hunched forward, he sat, supported by his forearms on the table, and his mouth sagged a little open, as he gazed listlessly before him with unseeing eyes. There he sat unheeded, neglected, ignored. A pathetic sight, this derelict Demosthenes, sitting there, old and frail, tired and spent. He looked a very sick man. But none in that assembly knew, watching him dozing there, that at that very moment the great French-



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man was doomed and that the pallid messenger with the inverted torch was even then behind his chair waiting to pluck him by the sleeve.

It was significant that it was not, as in the case of Britain, the Finance Minister who spoke for France. Britain regarded the question at issue as financial, but France regarded it mainly as political. Therefore, the Prime Minister was the one to deal with it. There was a feeling of interest and expectancy in the room when the Chairman called on M. Laval. This was the man who held the success or failure of the Conference in his power. If he followed what had been traditional French policy and stressed the political consideration of security, then there was little more that could be said. The Conference would have failed. The French Press regarded this Conference with suspicion and distrust. They were unfriendly towards it from the beginning. They declared that the British insistence on the Conference being held in London was in pursuance of the well-known tactics of British diplomacy of 'Divide and Rule,' with the deliberate intention of hindering the new movement towards Franco-German understanding. While the Conference was in session, the anti-British elements in the French Press were more unfair in their criticism and more bitter in their censure.

Nevertheless, the fact that the French delegates were actually in London, albeit reluctantly, was taken as a token of a more conciliatory attitude on the part of France, and then it was hoped that the speech of Mr. Stimson might have changed matters somewhat. Would France respond to America's lead? A glance at the hard, unsmiling face of the delegate who now rose was not reassuring. M. Laval was a youngish man to be Prime Minister of France, but Premiers in France have been in modern days younger than Premiers here. He is short, thickset, with a dark complexion. He wears black clothes, and the whiteness of his collar and tie was in ostentatious contrast to his dark clothes, his glossy, jet-black hair and his swarthy complexion. The deep sallowness of his features proclaimed him as typically of the Midi as Briand was of Normandy.

His speech was a keen disappointment. It was the speech of every French politician at every conference since the War.

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Divested of its polite circumlocutions, the speech was mean and cautious. There were protestations of a sincere desire to help Germany, but running through it all like a dark thread was the innate fear of a rejuvenated Germany, which all the suave politeness of M. Laval could not conceal. For sixty years this morbid obsession had influenced French policy, and no statesman dared ignore it. The French game was evidently delay, and they played it very effectively. When M. Laval sat down, a feeling of disappointment, of embarrassment came over the assembly. If this was to be the attitude, why did he leave Paris? This was the line he had taken with Dr. Brüning and Dr. Curtius in Paris. The journey had not softened it one iota.

That speech definitely and decisively determined the Conference. There was a remission to a committee of Finance Ministers of the question of ways to help Germany. It is true that the Conference retarded slightly the descent of Germany to chaos and disaster, but it accomplished nothing that could not have been achieved if there had been no conference. The two things done were inevitable. In the official words of the British Foreign Office, the proposals were that the Central Bank credit of £20,000,000 recently granted to the Reichsbank under the auspices of the Bank for International Settlements be renewed at maturity for a period of three months, and that concerted measures should be taken by the financial institutions in the different countries with a view to maintaining the volume of the credits they had already extended to Germany. The Conference recommended that the Bank for International Settlements should be invited to set up without delay a committee of representatives nominated by the Governors of the Central Banks interested to inquire into the immediate further credit needs of Germany, and to study the possibilities of converting a portion of the short-term credits into long-term credits.

On both those questions France was 'sticky,' but dared not oppose. On the question of the withdrawal of short-term loans, France was practically unaffected. It was Britain and America who were primarily involved in the £240,000,000 invested in Germany; there were 240,000,000 reasons why Germany should not be allowed to crash. But the proposal

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to grant new short-term loan credits to Germany, with the object of stabilizing their gold reserves, was definitely refused by France. This attitude was adopted by France on the first day of the Conference, and it was maintained until the last. To put it in picturesque American phrase : ' The Conference agreed all right to plug some of the leaks in Germany's water butt, but France was not willing to put more water in the tub, and even the plugs were but temporary.'

So far this eye-witness account of the famous Conference gives little more than a descriptive view of the public side of the Conference. There was another side, secret and furtive, known to only one or two. In spite of the flourish of trumpets with which it began, the polite conduct of its sessions, the protestations of goodwill and the aspirations that wafted it to its swan-like ending, this great Conference was a failure. The reasons for failure relate both to persons and to policies. The responsibility for the breakdown must lie chiefly on the head of the Chairman. It was on his initiative that the Conference was called. MacDonald liked a conference. From the rostrum of the conference hall MacDonald used to soar into Olympic heights of eloquence and command the acclamations of the spellbound multitude. When a child or a man does a thing well, he is tempted to do it often. Conferences indulged MacDonald's vanity complex ; they provided the occasion, and his personality and oratorical gifts did the rest. An international conference made him a world figure. Nowadays the subject is often Peace. There have been more orations on Peace than on any other subject. Peace ! What scope for a peroration ! What chances for purple patches !

More than all a conference gave MacDonald the excuse for absence from the House of Commons. If he waited in London, there was always the risk of being pestered by Ministers actually wanting something done. The Seven Power Conference was a gift from the gods. Coming in the middle of the dead season, it was the ' news ' of the week. The honour of presiding being his, MacDonald was, so to speak, the top of the world. At this international witenagemot, even amongst the famous men of many nations, he was the most conspicuous of all—the cynosure of all eyes, the idol of the hour. He had, too, a wonderful ' Press.'

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In the brilliant sunshine of a summer day, MacDonald's walk from Downing Street to the Foreign Office was like a royal progress. When he is seen at the door of the great little house, the crowd of pressmen and sightseers greet his appearance with a loud cheer that echoes down the narrow street. He pauses on the step, lets his eyes gaze over the throng, poses and smiles as a score of cameras click. He passes through the archway.

One cameraman after another leaps before him, twists round to face him, squints through the lens, clicks, and jumps sideways. He reaches the Foreign Office steps and turns to pose for more photographs. A microphone is brought forward. 'Will you say a few words, Mr. Prime Minister,' pleads a cinema-camera operator. He smiles protestingly as one who would deprecate so much attention and speaks a few platitudes. The photographer takes off his hat politely, as he thanks the Prime Minister.

The Seven Power Conference was a failure from the start. In the first place, it was a mistake to hold it in London. The Conference was to have been the grand finale of weeks of negotiations. In Berlin, in Paris, and in London, there had been discussions on the question of saving Germany. Everyone knew that France and France alone could end the deadlock. France had to be won over, and, therefore, the Conference should have been held in Paris. While M. Laval was in London, he was out of touch with his advisers; he could not consult with his base. He knew he was being watched with suspicion and misgiving. If concession and conciliation were to be obtained from France there was infinitely more chance of getting them in Paris than in London.

MacDonald was determined that the Conference should be held in London. Held in the greatest city in the world, it gave an incomparable opportunity for advertisement. These wise men were coming to consult with the British Premier. If the art of publicity consists in the dropping of a pebble in the pool every day, this was a boulder. That the Conference should succeed was of secondary importance. To him, provided that he got a conspicuous place behind the band, the grand parade counted more than the circus.

Another element which must have affected the success of the Conference was the fact that it was held in secret. The

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most elaborate precautions were taken that none but a specially favoured few were permitted to attend. No newspaper, British or foreign, was allowed to send a representative. What need was there for secrecy in a Conference attended by the most important nations in the world? If one great State had been absent, there might have been an excuse for the proceedings being concealed from it; but they were all there, and the world wanted the news. It is open to surmise whether France would have taken up such an unyielding position if her obstinacy had been exposed day by day. A secret Conference was the best field for the MacDonald diplomatic technique, but it played directly into the hands of France.

It is the absolute impossibility of keeping a great nation like Germany in a state of perpetual subordination that has given rise to the political troubles of Western Europe during these later years. Cicero quoted *Oderint dum metuant* as an ancient maxim, and Seneca characterized the phrase as a detestable sentiment. 'Let the Germans hate, provided that they fear,' is the cynical philosophy of France. Dr. Brüning, frantically anxious for help, was sent back to Berlin empty-handed, and M. Laval returned to Paris in triumph, to be acclaimed as the firm and resolute statesman—the man who did not give way.

Mr. Wickham Steed, the great authority on international politics, gives an interesting quotation to show the attitude of France on this question of financial help. Speaking of the Seven Power Conference, a French writer said:

'The characteristic feature of the negotiations has been the sustained and concerted effort of the English and the Americans to prevent us (the French) from utilizing the financial and economic dislocation of Germany for the aims of French policy.'

This is a frank description of France's attitude.

All these facts were known to MacDonald before a single session of the Conference had been held. No one at that Conference, with the possible exception of Briand, who was merely a spectator, knew the situation as MacDonald did. He had been through all this in 1924. The French policy was unchanged since the days when, as Foreign Secretary, he had

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negotiated with Poincaré. MacDonald had heard France's policy affirmed so often during those years that he could have written M. Laval's speech himself. Knowing all that, what plan had MacDonald to meet the French diplomacy? As Chairman, it was his duty to make the Conference a success. Failure might come to any conference through some development that could not be foreseen. No such development arose. The French delegation did not suddenly adopt new tactics that threw the Conference off its balance. Their attitude was as constant, as unchanging as the tick of a clock.

As for Germany, MacDonald knew that the only way in which the crisis could be met was by a large long-term loan to stabilize Germany's economic position for at least a year. Was that loan possible and who could give it? There were six nations at the Conference all declaring their anxiety and goodwill on behalf of Germany. Of these, Japan was too busy at home to spare anything. Italy and Belgium could plead poverty. America was badly hit by the blizzard and was at that moment engaged in a financial war, the success of which depended on how much gold she could withdraw from Europe. The moratorium had meant some sacrifice and was indeed the measure of her willingness to help but it was the limit of her direct contribution to the solution. Britain was perhaps least able to help, although she had in fact given most. She had helped Germany and Austria generously and at great sacrifice, and could not at that moment give another penny without risking her own financial stability.

France alone remained. The British Foreign Office had reported to MacDonald, on 11 July, the failure of Dr. Luther's attempt to raise a French loan. He had been informed that the President of the Reichsbank had spent many hours in Paris in a rather humiliating appeal for help. But he had found that the politician stood behind the financier's chair. France declared herself willing to advance the money, but on certain political conditions. These were, first, the abandonment by Germany of the projected Austro-German Customs Union, and, second, the abandonment of her two 'pocket battleships.' When these conditions were reported by Dr. Luther, the German Cabinet refused absolutely to accept them. Still it was France alone that could save the situation and in

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the last analysis the Conference was to do in London what Dr. Luther had failed to accomplish in Paris.

The strategy of France was the financial blockade of Germany, and in this unworthy manœuvre she was flouting the public opinion of the world. Someone should have challenged her. But who? There was only one member of that Conference who had the authority and the prestige to speak straight and plain to France, and that was the British Prime Minister. Mr. Stimson's position was different and very difficult. He had already taken a bold line of definite help to Germany. His speech was undoubtedly the most important, as it was, the most heartening, heard at the Conference, as it made the only definite, although indirect, offer. But it was an innovation for America to be there at all, having regard to her declared policy of isolation. It was obviously not the American Secretary's place to call the bluff of France. Britain and America, acting together, were, however, not without resources which could quickly cause France to alter her ruthless policy of starvation, and induce her to put into practice those principles of benevolence and philanthropy towards Germany which were her constant profession. All the world knew, if France didn't, that she could not really afford her present policy.

It was the duty of the chief British representative to try to save the Conference and Germany by a definite step. But MacDonald would not take that step.

This was one of the great 'Might-have-beens' of history. After the Seven Power Conference Brüning went back to Germany a disappointed and disheartened man. He went back to fight the greatest battle any man was ever called upon to fight. True, the Catholic Chancellor, who, it was said, 'wore an iron cross at the end of a rosary,' had made many serious mistakes both in his home and foreign policies. He played into the hands of the demagogues Hugenberg and Hitler when, acting autocratically, he dissolved the defiant Reichstag under Article 48.

It must be remembered that as far as Germany was concerned France always regarded herself as 'holding a wolf by the ears.' Military support from Britain she believed was essential to her security. It can be imagined, therefore, how badly

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Brüning blundered when he endorsed the Nazi view that the Versailles Treaty, with its reparation payments, was the chief cause of the world crisis. This was what Hitler and the Nationalists had been crying from the housetops, now, coming from that Sinai upon which the Chancellor dwelt, it was proclaimed as the veritable oracle of God. It gave a tremendous impetus to Nazi propaganda.

This dependence of France on Britain gave the latter a particularly strong bargaining position. MacDonald might have used that power when in April 1932 there occurred another chance of a German settlement. Brüning had come back to Geneva with very moderate proposals. Although Stimson and MacDonald heartily commended the German Chancellor's scheme and could have forced its acceptance, they failed to press it upon France, with the result that another golden opportunity was lost. Within a month Von Papen became Chancellor, Germany put the clock back. We rejected Brüning : we got Hitler.



## CHAPTER FORTY

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One does not need to endorse Marx's *Economic Interpretation of History* to realize that such a political event as the fall of the Labour Government in 1931 and the setting up of the 'National' Government had causes set deep in the economic structure of this country. In the last analysis it was the exploitation of an economic crisis that led to the political revolution of 1931. The major effects of the economic blizzard blowing round the globe, began to be felt in Great Britain in 1929 and threatened to bring her economic life to a standstill. Her commerce and industry were depressed, and her financial stability was gravely menaced.

As a consequence of the depression, unemployment increased, and the question of relief for the maintenance of the unemployed became the most urgent problem of the hour. There arose the age-long question as to how the burden of their maintenance should be distributed, and on this issue the political, as distinct from the economic, crisis developed. To this there were definite events and circumstances which formed, as it were, a background.

Every statement of the causes of the depression must begin with a reference to the War and the treaties and agreements which followed it. It was not foreseen at the time that the Peace Treaties with their War Debts and Reparations would simply transfer to the economic plane and prolong indefinitely the military operations of the War years. An inevitable consequence of these debt transactions was the centralization of much of the world's gold supply in very few hands. The situation was worsened by the fact that the creditor nations imposed high tariff barriers which made it more and more necessary for the debtor nations to pay in gold. To enable them to meet their obligations and, indeed, to save themselves

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from bankruptcy, Germany and Austria set about reorganizing their industries and to do this, borrowed widely. To London as the world's banker special appeal was made. Germany and Austria were promising very attractive terms for loans.<sup>1</sup>

During the inflationary period in France, which preceded the return of the franc to a gold basis, large numbers of French investors transferred their balance to London, and it so happened that these credits were available for lending to Germany and Austria. Thus it was possible for the City of London to make large profits if they were prepared to gamble. Two factors determined the danger—firstly, the fact that a very large amount of these deposits of French money was at 'short call,' and, secondly, as Britain was on the gold standard, there was the risk of the Bank of England being suddenly required to repay these loans in gold. What made matters worse was the fact that the City's extent of liability for these short-term loans was never known. The grave danger into which our want of knowledge of the extent of our vulnerability in this direction would lead us had been recognized by the MacMillan Committee on Finance and Industry, and the Committee recommended that a statement be published monthly, disclosing the amount of foreign balances and foreign liquid assets. This Committee stated that, on 31 March 1931, there was deposited in London 254 million pounds to the credit of foreigners. This was all 'short-term money.' This account was only an estimate, as the Committee admitted that they were unable to obtain a complete statement. Another authority put the figure much higher and suggested 325 millions.

The crisis in Central Europe began in Austria in May and spread in June to Germany. As the financial affiliations between these two countries were known to be close, the

<sup>1</sup> 'Lord Beaverbrook gives his authority to the statement that the rate of interest accruing to London from these foreign loans was extraordinary. He says: "Our financiers had been borrowing short and lending long—or, in effect, lending long because the German short money owing to us had become long money through the inability of that people to pay its debts on their due date. Our international financiers had been borrowing from the French and Americans at two per cent and lending to the Germans at eight per cent. The anxiety about the position of some of our houses dealing in foreign credits resulted in demands for foreign funds beyond the capacity of the Bank of England to meet them. But the fact must not be forgotten that Great Britain has £4,000,000,000 invested abroad. The sum now due to the foreigner in the form of short-term money is not more than £2,000,000,000."—*Sunday Express*, 6 September 1931.

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troubles of the Credit-Anstalt, the chief bank in Austria, alarmed foreign creditors. This fear was increased by a manifesto published at the beginning of June by the German Government, which was regarded as a proclamation to the whole world that 'Germany considers herself to have reached the end of her tether, unless it is in some way released.' A very significant statement was made by Dr. Luther, President of the Reichsbank, that there were large withdrawals of credits and sales of securities by foreigners and that these were due not to economic changes in Germany, but to 'occurrences of another kind,' including the troubles of the Credit-Anstalt, and presumably to the political difficulties which had at one time threatened the position of Dr. Brüning's Government.

The total withdrawals since the beginning of June were estimated to have amounted on 13 June to 40 million pounds. These withdrawals had their direct repercussions in this country. The Bank of England, having regard to the large commitments of the City in those countries, granted a credit of 4½ million pounds to the Austrian National Bank. Withdrawals from Germany continued unabated, until the banks were compelled to close their doors. This led directly to the calling of the Seven Power Conference in London.

It was not because of its failure that the Second Labour Government was overthrown, but because of its success and the methods by which that success was being achieved. The principle of dealing with the depression by means of planned reorganization was being put in force in Britain two years before President Roosevelt adopted a similar method in America. The New Deal was being inaugurated in Britain.

Every Minister discharged his duties with efficiency. In Foreign Affairs, Mr. Arthur Henderson put Great Britain into the leadership of the nations in the movement for Disarmament, International Co-operation, and World Peace. The prestige and confidence which the Labour Government had won for Great Britain was acknowledged by the unanimous selection of Henderson to preside over the World Disarmament Conference. In Home Affairs, every Department of State was pursuing a programme of constructive development. The first practical steps were taken to reorganize and control the Coal Industry in the national interest. Miners' hours

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were reduced and wages stabilized. New powers and financial assistance were given to Local Authorities to deal with Housing and the clearing of slums. No Government in British history had such a comprehensive programme to deal with Agriculture and the land, nor was there ever so energetic a Minister as Dr. Addison. Hundreds of thousands of widows and orphans, excluded by the Tory Act of 1925, were brought within the Pensions scheme. An estimated expenditure of £183,000,000 was approved to carry out schemes for the relief of unemployment. The Labour Minister for Transport was responsible for the Road Traffic Act of 1930, which embodied a definite conception of public service. In the London Passenger Transport Bill, the principle of public ownership was applied by the creation of a public authority consisting of a Board appointed by the Minister of Transport.

This programme of reconstruction and development was not the Conservative programme, and, therefore, the Government that promoted it was condemned. The method, however, by which the Labour Government was overthrown was unprecedented in British history. It was more like a French *coup d'état*. As originally planned, the fall of the Labour Government was to take place during the summer recess, and the instrument of its destruction was to be the May Report on Economy. It was regarded as absolutely essential that Parliament should not be in session. There must be no awkward questions asked. When the House of Commons resumed in the autumn, it must face a *fait accompli*; the Labour Government must have fallen and a 'National' Government have taken its place.

There was another element that had a more or less direct bearing on the time factor. The one result of the Seven Power Conference was the handing over to an international committee the arrangements for putting into effect the findings of the Conference, such as they were. This Committee was sitting at the Foreign Office when Parliament rose. If MacDonald delayed until after it had submitted its Report, it would be very awkward for him to explain how a country hurtling to financial disaster could still proclaim her financial stability by offering to lend money to Germany. He had to act speedily to forestall the publication of the International

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Committee's Report at all costs. As it was, he only did so by a few hours. On the day of his arrival from Lossiemouth, the world was told of the generosity of Britain, France, Belgium, Japan, and the United States.

Propaganda had been going on against the Labour Government for many months, but in the spring and early summer it reached a definite organized aggressiveness. The Press campaign denouncing the financial excesses of the Labour Government was then featured in every newspaper. The strategy was to raise such an outcry on the May Report's revelations of an unbalanced Budget that the Cabinet would have to be summoned.

The one task that then remained would be to get such disagreement as to the method of balancing the Budget between the Prime Minister and his Cabinet as would give him the excuse for resigning. The fight would be between MacDonald and Snowden, backed, as had been arranged, by the leaders of the Liberal and Tory Parties on one side and the Labour Cabinet on the other.

MacDonald knew that the most formidable force in the Cabinet that he would have to contend with was Mr. Arthur Henderson, and it is significant that the peak period of activity in arranging for the *coup d'état* was during the absence of the Foreign Secretary in France.

It is interesting to note that another reason given for the withdrawal of gold from London was the rumour that Mr. Henderson had given the French Ministers a very gloomy account of the position in London, and to have hinted that in the event of Germany being driven to declare a moratorium, Britain would have to follow her example. There is no doubt that MacDonald was responsible for this. At that time there was the bitterest antagonism between the two Ministers. While Henderson was in Paris, MacDonald spoke to him by telephone. In his talk he made the unguarded disclosure that he took the most pessimistic view of the financial situation in London. It was he and not Henderson that had used the ominous word *moratorium*, as the inevitable next step if the situation deteriorated. Indeed, this preaching of defeatism and despair was a valuable part of the scheme of those who wished to set up a 'National' Government. The blacker the

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picture of the crisis, the greater the excuse for severe and even violent measures to meet it. The consequences of this deliberate propaganda were serious and MacDonald was only too willing to throw the blame on to the Foreign Secretary.

Snowden, in his February speech, had shown how much his sympathy lay with those who preached economy. All Mr. Johnston's schemes for the benefit of the unemployed and all Dr. Addison's agricultural plans threatened to involve great expenditure of money ; expenditure meant taxation, and that hit the tax-paying class. True it is that there were ways to fight the depression, but they did not please the bankers and the City and, therefore, had to be strenuously opposed.

Everything was ready before Parliament rose for the summer vacation. Everything was working according to plan, when a weapon was put into the hand of the Prime Minister which was as miraculous as the sword Excalibur. The agent who put this deadly blade into MacDonald's hand was Mr. Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England. Besides being a financier, Mr. Norman is by way of being a politician. Indeed, it would seem that his chief preoccupations are with the political reactions of banking policy. He is a strong and interesting personality, somewhat theatrical in conduct as in dress ; he indulges in ostentatious aloofness and melodramatic showmanship. His influence over successive Chancellors of the Exchequer has been enormous. He would feign play the rôle of financial dictator, and he ruled not only the Bank of England, but the Treasury, with a rod of iron.

As neither MacDonald nor Snowden was an expert in finance, both having publicly declared their ignorance, neither was able to resist the dictation in financial matters of the Governor of the Bank of England. It is as a politician that Mr. Norman enters this story. He is obsessed with hostility to Socialism and the Labour Party. As he stood for the orthodox Conservative policy of economy, etc., he naturally believed that every moment a Labour Government remained in office was a calamity for the country. The May Report was as much his policy as if he had written it himself. Immediately on its publication he formed a Committee of Bankers to draw up a series of demands to be presented to the Labour Government, based on the findings of the Economy Committee. This

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ultimatum they presented to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

As Mr. Norman had been in close touch with the Prime Minister for some weeks, he knew well what the attitude of the Labour Cabinet would be. Not only did he know, but he had prepared for it. He informed the Premier that the supplies duly voted by the Commons for administrative services would not be forthcoming. He intimated that the gold stock in the Bank of England was becoming exhausted and a loan could not be raised abroad, unless on terms which, strange to say, practically coincided with the Bankers' demands. Now, as about £12,000,000 was required every Friday for Unemployment Benefit alone, this intimation that the stock was running short created dismay. After the Governor of the Bank of England brought the tremendous tidings of the impending crash, he went on holiday across the Atlantic.

A significant sidelight on Mr. Norman's mysterious disappearance was given in *The Times* as follows :

'New York, August 25th. The arrival of Mr. Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England, at Quebec, at a time when Mr. Burgess, Deputy Governor of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, is visiting Seal Harbour, Maine, has given rise to reports here that Mr. Norman is planning to confer with representatives of the Federal Reserve system at Bar Harbour, presumably with regard to an extension of the Bank of England's American credit. Seal Harbour adjoins Bar Harbour, which is readily accessible from Quebec, and on at least two occasions in the past Mr. Norman has met members of the Reserve Board at Bar Harbour.'

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### *THE RETURN FROM LOSSIEMOUTH*

**B**efore MacDonald left London, when the House rose for the summer recess in 1931, he made all the necessary arrangements for his speedy return when he got the signal that the train had been laid. Members of Parliament had been warned that circumstances might arise that would necessitate the reassembly of Parliament before the stipulated date in October. The Speaker had been authorized to summon Members if and when the Prime Minister informed him that such action was necessary.

The business that was to call Members together was the international situation. The Seven Power Conference had been a failure, and it was feared that the German situation might precipitate a European crisis. This was the reason that MacDonald gave for arranging for the recall of Members. The true reason was something quite different. MacDonald endeavoured to make it appear that the reassembly of Parliament was uncertain, whereas he knew that it was definite and inevitable if his premeditated purpose had to be achieved. Finally, the Post Office had everything ready, awaiting instructions. Everything went according to plan. After only three days in Lossiemouth, MacDonald received a communication from London that matters had developed so far as to warrant his 'sitting in' at the game himself. He had expected the call. 'I knew my holiday would be a broken one,' he admitted later.

He set out for London. Long before he arrived at King's Cross, at 7.30 a.m. on 11 August 1931, he had realized that his difficulties would increase from the moment when he stepped off the train. His anxiety and nervousness must have been overwhelming, for he was about to bring off the biggest coup of his life. He knew that, in a few days, he would be the centre of interest, not only in London, but throughout the



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world. If the plan succeeded, it meant a political upheaval. The fall of a Government is, everywhere, front-page news, and the collapse of the Labour Government in Great Britain would make the world's wires hum. It was to be revolution, but not the revolution which the Socialists had dreamed of for thirty years. That revolution was to be Labour victorious; this was to be Labour defeated and discredited. He would make it a personal triumph for himself, although it must mean disaster for his Party.

His first difficulty would be what to tell the reporters who awaited his arrival. A Press interview with a political chief is always a battle of wits. How was he to explain his dramatic return to London, his broken holiday? His story would be difficult to tell; one of the first essentials of political strategy, as of military, is secrecy, and MacDonald had one big secret to hide. No word or hint must be given that the scheme to form a 'National' Government—a scheme that had been maturing for several weeks—was about to come to fruition. For months, the question had been discussed in the Conservative Clubs as a desirable possibility. Later, its probability—indeed, its imminence—became the whispered tit-bit of political gossip. But the general public did not know. Of course, a manoeuvre of that magnitude could not be concealed from the Press. As long, however, as the scheme did not go beyond the smoking-rooms of Mayfair and a few discreet hints in the Press, no great harm was done. Once, however, it became public property that a conspiracy was afoot to destroy the Labour Government, the success of the scheme would be endangered. It was the necessity for this concealment that made MacDonald view the prospect of his meeting with the representatives of the Press as extremely awkward.

His explanation of his speedy return to London must possess the appearance of frankness. To evade the question would be to arouse suspicion. The difficulty of giving a safe answer to an alert journalist on a subject where concealment is necessary is increased by the fact that the answerer does not know how much the questioner already knows. How much did these men know of MacDonald's real purpose in coming south? It was a supreme test of the diplomacy of which he was so proud. MacDonald knew well that favourite artifice

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of journalists known in Scotland as 'speirin' the road ye ken'—which means asking for direction when you already know your way. The real purpose of such a question is not to get information, but to see how the questioned person will deal with the inquiry. Why had the Prime Minister hurried back to London? The answer to that question was known to the Pressmen or, at least, suspected by them. How would MacDonald deal with it?

"I am going to see certain Ministers," he said in a casual manner, "and discuss with them the general situation. When I have their views, I shall probably return to Scotland; it may be to-night or it may be to-morrow." The business which brought the Prime Minister to London was so urgent that it compelled him to break his holiday and yet could be disposed of in a few hours. The surprising brevity of the proposed visit after such a long journey led a reporter to ask the direct question: "How long do you intend to remain in London?" "I do not know how long I shall stay in London," he said. "That depends on how many Ministers are available to confer with on the questions before us, but I propose to return to Lossiemouth as soon as possible."

Then came rather an awkward question about the May Report. Yes, he had completed his study of the report of Sir George May's Economy Committee, but he emphasized the point that no action regarding it would be decided until the special meeting of the Cabinet to deal with it later in the month. It was not, then, the May Report, with its sensational indictment of the Labour Government, that had caused him to hasten south. Why, then, had he come? What question would be discussed with the Ministers when he met them? This was what the journalists wanted to know. They tried again and asked: "Will the Ministers deal with the international financial situation or the Economy Committee recommendations?" MacDonald's previous answer had been intended to dispel any suggestion that the publication of the May Report had any connection with his return to London, but this repetition of the question showed that his answer had not been satisfactory. "Well, you may call it general governmental business. That is all. I cannot go into details, and I am afraid I cannot tell you anything more."

## THE RETURN FROM LOSSIEMOUTH

The Prime Minister was closing the interview, and the journalists had got nothing out of him. The one question that they all wanted to ask was whether his sudden return had any connection with the formation of the proposed 'National' Government, and that was just the question that MacDonald had hoped to avoid. He all but managed it and was on the point of hurrying off, smiling genially, when it was hurled at him straight and hard. Had the Prime Minister any comment to make on the report that Conservative Members were appealing to him to form an emergency government? The significant interrogation struck home, and MacDonald halted, hesitating. His answer, when it came, dodged the issue. 'He jouked and let the jaw go by.' "I have not even seen the report," he said. MacDonald's characteristic idiom of evasion was almost as revealing to those who knew him as a frank and straightforward statement. Almost, but not quite, for all Press interviews with MacDonald were exasperatingly unsatisfactory. It was not his reticence that made them so, for reticence is the habit, as it is the privilege, of statesmen. It was that his answers were not only evasive but deliberately intended to deceive—to throw his interviewers off the scent. On this occasion, the prevarication did not deceive. What displeased the Pressmen was that he should think that he had hoodwinked them.

As MacDonald went off smiling, it might be thought that he had succeeded. True, his words contained nothing that could be used in evidence against him, but in reality he had failed to conceal what he wished so anxiously to hide. It was plain that he had not come back so soon from Lossiemouth, bringing Miss Ishbel MacDonald with him, merely for a general talk on the situation with Ministers picked up casually. He had come to London to carry out the plan that had been long devised, and the people whom he saw were those who were directly concerned in the *coup d'état*. He had told the reporters that the length of his stay in London depended on how many Ministers were available. The fact was that he made no attempt to see any of his Ministers, with the exception of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was, of course, a confederate.

The Press did an ill turn to the Prime Minister on the day

## *THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD*

after his return. Several newspapers stated that Mr. Montagu Norman and other bankers had presented to him an ultimatum on the Budget. As he wished to claim that the bankers had never interfered on any political matter, this revelation was most unfortunate. However, as it turned out, it did not matter, as it was not until later that its significance was realized, and then, as the Labour Government had fallen meantime, the revelation came too late to affect the position.

The truth behind this piece of news was that Mr. Montagu Norman, of the Bank of England, Mr. Reginald McKenna, of the Midland Bank, Mr. Beaumont Pease, of Lloyd's Bank, Mr. F. C. Goodenough, of Barclay's Bank, and other bankers had openly entered politics, and they entered with a definite policy. For a long time, Mr. Montagu Norman and other bankers had been secretly at work. The keenness of their determination to persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to adopt the policy of drastic economics in expenditure on social services, on reduction of wages, and on direct taxation had forced them into publicity. They had been in conference on the May Report, had drawn up a series of proposals on its main recommendations, and had presented them to the Prime Minister through the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The fact that several of the leading newspapers had got hold of this tit-bit of news was particularly disconcerting ; it threatened to upset the whole scheme. The Prime Minister had to affirm and deny the same thing, or, at least, he had to make two contradictory statements. This, indeed, he did. Later in the House of Commons he felt compelled to say :

‘ I wish to state, specifically and emphatically, and this has been reported to my colleague before, that never in the whole of the negotiations carried on by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and myself, with the approval of the Government, and reported to it immediately after each interview, did the banks interfere with political proposals. They simply confined themselves to giving us expert advice as to the effect of the proposals on the possible yield of the loan.’

Nevertheless, the basis of his case was that the bankers of France and the United States were making definite conditions,



Fortunately we are not yet near the day when  
Television will enable persons to see one another  
over the Telephone..... SAYS THE Radio-*Master-General*.

## TELEPHONE-TELEVISION



LOW

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which were political conditions and which the British Government must give effect to by legislation ; otherwise, the loan would not be forthcoming.

Having endeavoured to balance the cone on its apex, he found, as time went on, that it became more and more difficult to defend this position, as the facts began to leak out. Questions more and more searching began to be asked in the Commons, until, at last, the dissolution of Parliament for the election put an end to the embarrassing interrogations.

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

### *A SUB-COMMITTEE OF FIVE*

THE Labour Government appointed a sub-committee of five members of the Cabinet to consider the May Report and present proposals to the Cabinet. The Prime Minister was chairman of the sub-committee, and the other members were Arthur Henderson, Snowden, J. H. Thomas, and William Graham.

At the first meeting of the sub-committee two weeks after Parliament had risen, the Chancellor shocked everyone by announcing that, in the financial year, 1932-1933, the Budget deficit would not be the 120 millions suggested by the May Report, but probably 180 millions. It was strange that the May Committee, with all the resources of information at their command, should have made a mistake of 60 millions. How was this enormous sum made up? Again and again, in the sub-committee and, later, in the Cabinet, the Chancellor was asked how this extraordinary figure was arrived at, but no convincing answer was given. It was obvious that this phantom figure of 180 millions was merely an overstatement to intimidate the sub-committee. A rather surprising point revealed later was that, even in this time of crisis, 60 millions for the Sinking Fund was to be set aside—the normal provision.

After this very disconcerting introduction, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor declared that large economies must be effected at once. Then came another announcement that staggered the Committee almost as much as the other. The Prime Minister coolly informed the members that he had been in consultation with the leaders of the other political parties. This was the first intimation of the intrigue that was to develop during the days that followed. It surprised Henderson and Graham at the time, as the reason for it, the setting up of a 'National' Government, was not then revealed. The

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Prime Minister also intimated that there had been interviews with Sir Ernest Harvey, Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. Sir Ernest had been acting in the absence of Mr. Montagu Norman, who was stated to be ill.

No definite figure of the economies was suggested to the sub-committee. The May Committee had recommended 96 millions ; but, as that sum included savage cuts in all departments of unemployment insurance, it seemed to be recognized that it would not be agreed to by a Labour Government. The enormous total of 180 millions was continually kept before the Committee, and the preliminary review of the economies was directed to finding out how large a proportion of that total could be covered by reductions in expenditure. It was understood that, once this proportion had been ascertained, the Committee would pass on to consider methods of raising additional revenue.

It soon became manifest that the sub-committee was sharply divided. MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas were acting together ; Henderson and Graham were joined on the other side. MacDonald and Snowden had evidently come well primed. A deficit can be met by increasing revenue or by diminishing expenditure. The Prime Minister insisted on discussing expenditure. Henderson protested that this was beginning at the wrong end. Surely before discussing drastic cuts in essential services, it would be well to find out what resources could be obtained in the field of additional taxation. MacDonald and Snowden strongly opposed this view ; they would discuss cuts and nothing else. It was impossible for Henderson and Graham to prevent this, but they again and again insisted that they would not be bound by any decision come to ; they considered that they were merely engaged in a preliminary examination. Afterwards there might be a report to the Cabinet, not necessarily with specific recommendations. In effect, the hands of all were to be kept entirely free.

The Treasury had supplied a rather important document. Having regard to the fact that the May Report was largely the product of the Treasury, it was inevitable that the suggestions in the memorandum should bear traces of that relationship. One difference, however, was that the Treasury recommended a cut of 10 per cent in unemployment benefit rates, whereas



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the May Committee indicated a cut of 20 per cent. It included a proposal which would have meant that the whole of transitional benefit, or most of it, would be passed on to the public assistance authorities, and it also contained drastic economies in other spheres that were subsequently included in proposals put before the Cabinet. Henderson and Graham repeatedly protested against the wielding of the knife. The cuts suggested were so unjust, so savage, and directed so cruelly against the poorest of the community, that there was no possibility that they would be accepted by the Labour Movement. They intimated to the Prime Minister emphatically that they believed the proposal to cut the rate of unemployment insurance benefit to be unfair and inequitable and that it would never be accepted by the rank and file of the Party. They were determined, in no circumstances, to agree to a cut in the rate of unemployment insurance benefit. It is interesting to note that, on this point, MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas, agreed with Henderson and Graham. The sub-committee were, at this time, unanimous on this question, which was the bone of contention later. The proposed cut of 10 per cent on unemployment insurance benefit was, therefore, deleted.

On the question of transferring the recipients of transitional benefit to the public assistance authorities, the sub-committee came to no definite finding. It was pointed out to the Chancellor that it would probably be quite impossible to pass more than a small part of this liability on to the local authorities.

The question of a 'means test' was raised. It was suggested that, although some form of means test might be advisable, it should not be on a public assistance basis. That question was left in rather a vague form. It was thought that, as the question of the means test raised large questions of policy, it would be better if it were left to the Cabinet to decide.

The other proposals in this Treasury memorandum were considered, but no final decisions were reached nor any recommendations made. It was generally agreed that the ground had been covered in this preliminary analysis, and matters were so prepared for the meeting of the Cabinet on 19 August. It was on that basis that the report of the sub-committee was submitted to the full meeting of the Cabinet.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor reported their

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continuing conversations with Sir Ernest Harvey, representing the Bank of England. When the Prime Minister had given an account of the interview, it was suggested that, having regard to the importance of the questions raised, their difficulty and the awkwardness of indirect discussion, it would be better if all the members of the Cabinet Committee should meet Sir Ernest Harvey and any other representative acting with him. This proposal, it was plain, embarrassed the Prime Minister. The suggestion was preposterous ; it would never do at all. These bankers were not accustomed to meetings with politicians. The truth was, of course, that leading bankers had discussed questions of finance, currency, etc., with Members of Parliament in Committee Room 14 of the Commons on several occasions during the previous sessions. Indeed, a few weeks before, Mr. Montagu Norman and Dr. Sprague, Financial Adviser to the Bank of England, had had a very lively and interesting discussion on finance and economies with Labour Members, to their mutual edification and profit.

No, the Prime Minister indicated, it would not be fair to embarrass the bankers in this way. It would be much more convenient if these diffident money-changers put the case to the head of the Government, or to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as the Minister immediately responsible. One or other of them would pass it on to the members of the sub-committee. The Committee did not press for direct communication with the bankers. It is idle to surmise what would have been the result if the Committee had met, face to face, those who could have explained the true position. They put their trust in MacDonald as go-between, to interpret the situation, and it was only when it was too late that they found that he had misled them.

The Prime Minister painted one side of the picture in the blackest colours, describing the terrible state that public finance had reached. He spoke of impending disaster. The French loan of 25 millions and the American loan of the same amount were being exhausted. The Chancellor declared that these loans would not last many more days. There must be a definite statement regarding a balanced Budget at once.

That the political leaders of the Liberal and Tory Parties were thinking along the same lines as the City and the bankers was seen from the joint demand made by them to the Prime

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Minister. Even at that early date, MacDonald made it clear that two things were essential—there must be much larger aggregate economies and, in particular, there must be a reduction in the rates of unemployment insurance benefit. It was plain that MacDonald and Snowden accepted in full the recommendations of the May Committee.

After a great deal of anxious and searching review, the total of possible economies, when the papers left the sub-committee, was, round about 70 millions. These figures had, however, changed from day to day and from hour to hour, as there was never agreement as to what was definitely included or excluded.

One point raised by the Chancellor led to some confusion. It had been proposed that, as a help towards making the Unemployment Insurance Fund solvent, there might be some increase in contributions. Anything that improved the state of the insurance fund benefited the Budgetary position. Snowden contended that all extra contributions, etc., should not be regarded as savings; but other members of the Committee felt that these things should be regarded as savings, in so far as they reduced directly or indirectly the call on the Exchequer. There was a contribution towards a balanced Budget to the extent of the increased revenue.

As a means of decreasing expenditure, the question of the conversion of some part of the National Debt was suggested. The Chancellor of the Exchequer definitely stated that any such conversion was absolutely impracticable at the moment, but he indicated that he would attempt it at the earliest possible moment. He declared, moreover, that the saving would be comparatively small. Other members doubted this and urged that the saving in interest would be considerable. They were proved right; Snowden's was an under-estimate, as was shown when Mr. Neville Chamberlain made a partial conversion in 1933.

It was urged, in reply to Snowden's belittling reference, that it would be wrong and quite unfair to ask for sacrifices from many other sections of the community, unless there was a definite statement that drastic steps were to be taken regarding the burden of interest on the National Debt.

There was an interesting discussion on the question of a tariff as a means of revenue. The only one who openly

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expressed himself in favour of it in principle was Mr. Thomas, although it was known to some of the others that MacDonald was secretly in favour of it. When the question was put directly whether the Committee would prefer a revenue tariff to a cut in the rates of unemployment insurance benefit or such other attack on the social services, then four of the five voted for a tariff. The dissenting member was Snowden, as all who knew his rigid Cobdenism would have anticipated.

In speaking of new taxation, Snowden displayed an artful strategy. He was on his own ground here. No one could confute him at the time, and, if he were accused, when it came to a Budget statement, of non-fulfilment of a pledge, he could always have several quite convincing answers available. He could make his estimate of taxation as high as he liked ; it was good policy to do so. He indicated to the Committee that probably 70 millions or 80 millions or an even higher figure would require to be found from taxation. He mentioned, in general terms, that probably 62 millions would be required from direct taxation, which meant an additional sixpence in the pound on income tax, the revision of surtax and death duties, the withdrawal of certain tax concessions on the lower ranges of income, and, for the purpose of dealing with the *rentier* problem, further differentiation against unearned income. This, he explained, was the only method by which, in the opinion of the Treasury, all sections of the *rentier* classes could be reached and equitably treated in any demand for additional contributions.

The Chancellor's remarks on the question of new indirect taxation were discreet and generally non-committal. He certainly stated, however, that he could probably get a substantial yield by raising the duties on beer and tobacco, by a possible addition to the petrol tax, and probably by revision of the entertainments tax. He did not supply the sub-committee with any detailed figures, and he added, quite properly, that that side of the problem must be reserved for a Budget statement, strictly confidential in character until disclosed on the floor of the House of Commons.

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

### MACDONALD, SNOWDEN, AND SAMUEL

To set up a 'National' Government is an enterprise of great stress and moment. It involves demolition as well as reconstruction. There had to be considerable haste and urgency on the part of the Prime Minister, the principal actor in the drama, as time is one of the most important elements in a *coup d'état*. As a 'National' Government must, by definition, have representation of all parties, so Mr. Neville Chamberlain and Sir Samuel Hoare represented the Conservatives and Sir Herbert Samuel and Sir Donald Maclean the Liberals.

It is to be noted that, during the early hours of the fateful negotiations, MacDonald did not see any of his Cabinet except Snowden and Thomas. It was not until he had arranged matters with the political opponents of the Labour Party that he had his first meeting with the Cabinet sub-committee. It is significant that those whom MacDonald chiefly consulted were Conservatives or Liberals—men who had attacked the Labour Government; men who believed the Labour Government to be driving the country to ruin; men who were determined to overthrow it at the earliest moment.

The Press campaign against the Labour Government was becoming increasingly intensive. Leading articles in *The Times*, *Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph*, etc., lampooned the Socialists, and defamatory letters from City men and bankers clamoured daily for the overthrow of the Labour Government. As its downfall was to be accomplished by means of a financial manœuvre, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to be brought in. MacDonald was well aware that he could not move without Snowden's aid, but he dared not go too far to get it.

His first task on his return to London was to find out how far Snowden would go with him in the setting up of a 'National' Government. What made this task dangerous was the fact

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that the personal relations between himself and the Chancellor were the worst possible for two men who were colleagues in the same Cabinet. Throughout the whole of his career, MacDonald had been compelled to have association with Snowden, and again and again he had come up against him. Twenty-five years earlier, when as young Labour Members they had entered Parliament on the same day, they had been more or less friendly. As time went on, they drifted farther and farther apart. At first, they were rivals for leadership. Then they became antagonists and finally enemies. MacDonald's attitude towards Snowden had gone from amity by way of envy and dislike to hatred. Snowden retaliated by placing MacDonald in his estimation on a lower plane—the plane of cynical contempt. To MacDonald, Snowden was an obstinate political prude, with a foolish devotion to old-fashioned causes like Land-Law Reform, Free Trade, and Temperance. To Snowden, MacDonald was a political impostor, a canting humbug. When, at last, Snowden did publicly denounce MacDonald, it was not until he had got all he wanted, and it was beyond MacDonald's power to injure him.

MacDonald would rather have avoided any consultation with Snowden, but that was impossible. The interview was an ordeal that would have daunted Machiavelli. Snowden had been the one man in the Cabinet whom MacDonald had feared. To have confided to him everything that was in his mind would have put his political life into the hands of his enemy. It was a battle of wits, the fox and the weasel. He spent two hours with the Chancellor, but found him wary, cautious, non-committal. For all his ingenuity, he could make no headway with the astute Snowden.

Nor was his interview with the leader of the Conservative Party any more conclusive. Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin had sailed on 9 August from Southampton for Cherbourg *en route* for Aix-les-Bains. In about four days Baldwin was recalled to London, and, in an interview with the Prime Minister, he learned how matters were proceeding. Then, although MacDonald must surely have impressed upon him the imminence of the crisis, the extreme danger into which the country had fallen, and the fact that, if MacDonald spoke true, the ship of State was heading straight for the rocks, just when his skill

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and help and counsel would be most urgently needed, back Baldwin goes to the sulphurous springs of the French resort, leaving MacDonald alone, unaided, on the bridge. There may have been two reasons for this strange action. He may not have believed that the peril was as desperate as MacDonald had depicted or he may have decided not to be mixed up with him in a shady intrigue.

A vital factor in the negotiations was the fact that the chief spokesman for the Liberal Party was Sir Herbert Samuel. Although he nominally accepted the leadership of Mr. Lloyd George, it was well known that on some very important questions of policy they were far from being in agreement. He is really an old-fashioned Liberal and a keen individualist. As a leader, he was more the Moses of the Wilderness than the Joshua of the Conquest. Samuel, the Jew, resembled MacDonald, the Scot. Both were skilful and calculating in the game of politics. Both inclined towards expediency. Both had an ambition that kept a watchful eye on the door of opportunity.

For many reasons it was lucky for MacDonald that Mr. Lloyd George was ill at that time. If he had remained leader of the Liberals, the intrigue that set up the 'National' Government would have been well-nigh impossible. It is hard to believe that MacDonald would have dared to foist this scheme upon the country if Lloyd George had been able to attack it with the full vigour of his denunciation. He would have blown the project sky-high with the battery of his wit and ridicule. At any rate, the personal relations between the two would have made co-operation impracticable.

To Sir Herbert Samuel this was a tremendous opportunity. It was the chance of a lifetime, not only for himself but for the Liberal Party itself. At a time when the Liberal Party had lost all hope of ever again holding the high position which had once been its proud distinction ; when, in the country, electoral defeat followed defeat, and reduced the Party to negligible insignificance ; when, in the House of Commons, the representatives of the Liberal Party, because of their support of the Labour Government, were being sneered at daily as 'Portuguese' and ridiculed as 'Patient Oxen' ; when all hope of ever again enjoying the sweets of office had faded on the far

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horizon, suddenly, unexpectedly, Sir Herbert Samuel is asked to join in the negotiations which, at the worst, meant recognition and, at the best, might lead to high office. It is not surprising, having regard to the circumstances, personal and political, that Sir Herbert Samuel accepted, with alacrity, MacDonald's invitation to join the cabal. He was too astute not to appreciate his indispensability and not to understand MacDonald's reasons. A National all-Party Government must include the Liberal Party.

Again, the Liberal Party had stood on the pivot of the Parliamentary see-saw for two years, ready to put the plank down as suited its purpose. By a little transference of the centre of gravity, the Labour Government could have been destroyed. That power would remain and would indeed become all important, whatever might be the conclusion of these discussions. The ultimate result of the negotiations must be endorsed by Parliament. Unless the Labour Government came to a decision on economy that was agreeable to the Liberals, it was doomed, for on the first day of Parliament they could move a vote of no confidence in the Government, and, cheerfully supported by the Tories, would certainly turn the Government out. MacDonald, therefore, recognized that the support of Sir Herbert Samuel was all important.

Another reason was that the Liberal Party was historically pledged to retrenchment. It was, in fact, a Liberal motion demanding economy, moved by Sir Donald Maclean, that had led to the setting up of the May Committee on Economy. Thus it was fitting that Sir Donald Maclean, who had previously belonged to the Asquith section of the Liberal Party and was an ardent advocate of curtailment of expenditure, should have been one of the representatives of his Party in the negotiations. Three, yea, four times blessed was MacDonald in that he had contrived to persuade Sir Herbert Samuel and Sir Donald Maclean to support him in his negotiations—two obviously honest men.



## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

### *MACDONALD AND THE T.U.C.*

**W**hy did MacDonald ask the advice of the Trade Union Congress in the crisis? To understand why he did this, regard must be had to the relation between the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party. The relationship is one of parent to child, for the Labour Party was the creation of the Trade Union Congress. Throughout the thirty-four years that have passed since its inception, the Labour Party has looked to the Congress for its support and inspiration. In these years, it has steadily increased its strength and influence and has been twice the established Government of the country. The Congress is fully represented on the Party's governing body, the National Executive.

On 13 August 1931 Mr. Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, received an urgent message to convene a meeting of the General Council in order that the view of the Cabinet Sub-committee on Economy should be presented to them. A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party was also convened for the same purpose. The General Council of the Trade Union Congress, the Executive Committee of the Labour Party and the sub-committee of the Cabinet met on 20 August.

The meeting was addressed by the Prime Minister. He described the financial difficulties in which the Government was placed. Nothing that they had not already learned from the Press of balancing the Budget and of the dangerous consequences if that course were not followed was contained in the Premier's statement. After a very involved preamble, the Prime Minister came nearer home. The Budget could only be balanced by a combination of two methods—economy and taxation. On the side of economy, the Cabinet sub-committee found themselves in a position of great difficulty. They were

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compelled by the exceptional and menacing circumstances to consider economy which in normal times they would never have dreamed of appealing to the Labour Movement to accept. There was no change of principle. Labour policy was exactly as it had always been, but it was necessary in this emergency that we should endeavour to face the responsibilities imposed on us. A hint was thrown out that new taxation of some kind would be necessary, and the phrase 'equal sacrifice' was used. Then, after making a most involved and unsatisfactory statement, the Prime Minister sat down. His hearers were surprised and indignant. If the meeting was to hear no more, it should not have been convened. They had been called from the holidays to hear an authoritative statement of the position. They had expected to be taken into the confidence of the Prime Minister as responsible members of his Party and to have his full policy explained to them. As it was, they learned nothing. The Prime Minister's speech, apart from its pious platitudes, could have been made by Baldwin.

After the Prime Minister's statement, there was an awkward silence. Everyone expected that some other member of the sub-committee would rise and give in some specific form the information they had been summoned to receive. Evidently, however, no more was to be said. Mr. Citrine then rose and protested. Why had the meeting been summoned? It was of no use to convene a meeting of that character unless the delegates were told why they had been called together and what they were expected to do. Mr. Citrine spoke very strongly and evidently annoyed the Prime Minister. No protest, however, could make him say another word. Referring afterwards to the Prime Minister's speech, Mr. Citrine said :

' Much as I regret to have to say it, never have I heard a body of responsible, intelligent men addressed in the manner in which we were addressed.'

After some delay, the Chancellor of the Exchequer rose to reply. Characteristically, his speech was definite and clear. What he said was :

' The Cabinet Committee have been considering a series of proposals ; they have not accepted any of these proposals ;

none of them are final ; none of them are definite ; they are merely things that we have been applying our minds to, and upon which we should desire to have an expression of opinion from you. We have come to the end of borrowing ; we can no longer continue the practice of providing for unemployment by borrowing ; we shall have to provide out of the annual revenue the sum necessary to meet the deficit on the Insurance Fund itself and the amounts necessary for transitional benefits. But we think it is a burden which will be too great to bear, unless we take steps to place the fund on a basis more nearly self-supporting than it is now. We propose to increase contributions by an equal amount from the three parties ; we propose to raise £5,000,000 from the employers, £5,000,000 extra in contributions from the workers, £5,000,000 from the State. We furthermore propose that the period of insurance benefit shall be reduced to twenty-six weeks. I am talking about twenty-six weeks in any particular year, of course. These are the only two proposals we are making. There is no proposal for a cut in the amount of unemployment benefit.'

In view of the fact that the Labour Government resigned because it was unwilling to cut unemployment benefit, nothing could be more revealing than Snowden's very frank and emphatic statement.

As the Trade Union Congress had been called into consultation by the Labour Cabinet and as their advice had been asked, they examined the question and drew up a series of alternative proposals and submitted them to the Prime Minister. MacDonald replied, thanking the Congress for their suggestions, which he felt compelled to reject, although, he declared, nothing gave him greater regret than to disagree with old friends.

The statement of Snowden to the Labour Party leaders and the Trade Union Congress that there was to be no cut in unemployment benefit and the silence of MacDonald on the point are suggestive of something else. It is difficult to get an honest partner to a swindle, but, if it is not impossible, Snowden may have been that partner. Even now, after all that has happened, after he had alienated himself from his Labour

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friends, there are those who still ask, in complete bewilderment : ' Why did Snowden do it ? ' It is obvious that MacDonald did not take Snowden into his complete confidence in the early stages of the negotiations, nor did Snowden realize how far MacDonald was committed to the Conservative policy.

Although MacDonald did not mention the cut in unemployment benefit in his speech to the Trades Union Congress, it was not because he had abandoned it, but because he feared to mention it in that company. Certain indications had led him to be wary. He feared that Snowden would not go all the way with him. A statement had been made by the Chancellor that worried the Prime Minister considerably to the effect that, in these questions of sacrifice, the Cabinet must take their supporters with them. It would be idle, he believed, to try to proceed if the Labour Government opposed. There is little doubt that at this time Snowden, unlike MacDonald, was genuinely anxious to find agreement. It is clear that, when Snowden did learn of MacDonald's purpose, he had committed himself too far to be able to withdraw.

Nothing is more evident and nothing fits the facts and circumstances more truly than that MacDonald was determined that there should be no agreement between himself and the T.U.C. Thus, paradoxically as it may seem, the very futility of the meeting was its success as far as MacDonald was concerned.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

### *THE FALL OF THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT, 1931*

**T**he first meeting of the Cabinet to deal with the crisis met on 19 August 1931, in the Cabinet room at Downing Street. A foolscap sheet of figures was given to each of the members. This document dealt with possible methods of relieving the burden on the Unemployment Insurance Fund and of balancing the Budget. It began with a statement by which most of the Cabinet learned for the first time the enormous estimated deficit for the current year ; it proceeded with proposals for 62 millions to be raised by direct taxation and 26 millions by indirect taxation ; it went on to specify further possible economies. The Chancellor of the Exchequer intimated that these particulars were merely put before them as a basis for discussion. They were, in fact, purely tentative. As a result of the discussion on this document, particular items relating to economies were provisionally accepted, subject always to final agreement on the scheme as a whole.

On the vital question of unemployment insurance, several suggestions were put forward as to contributions, etc., but it was definitely agreed that it was impractical to place even the partial maintenance of unemployed workers, not in receipt of statutory benefit, on the Poor Law, through the Public Assistance Authority. It should be noted as of special importance, in view of what happened later, that the figures laid before the Cabinet did not include any suggestions for a reduction in the rates of unemployment benefit. It is also significant that, although the Chancellor of the Exchequer had not reported that the question of a revenue tariff had been discussed at the meetings of the sub-committee, he was not able to prevent the question being raised. The Prime Minister, knowing the difficulty that arose from the dogmatic inflexibility of Snowden, sought to shelve the question. He was unable to

## *THE TRAGEDY OF RAMSAY MACDONALD*

do this, and an indication was sought as to whether this subject should be included for consideration. After some talk it was clear that a considerable majority of the Cabinet were unwilling to rule out tariffs, especially if they might be an alternative to cuts in unemployment benefit.

The Prime Minister then proposed that the Cabinet should review the general position and its effect on the Parliamentary position. After some general discussion, Mr. Arthur Henderson suggested that the Parliamentary Labour Party might not be willing to accept the proposals which had been discussed, and he proposed that the Cabinet should meet them. Then Mr. Thomas declared emphatically that, if the Labour Government could not carry out a programme on lines similar to those put forward as a basis of discussion, the members of the Labour Cabinet were bound to support any government that would do so. This suggestion of Thomas was received in silence and would have been ignored, had not the Prime Minister interposed with the first cautious, non-committal, and apparently casual reference to the possibility of a National Government. The idea was not taken up seriously nor discussed.

On 20 August, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had a conference with the leaders of the Liberal and Conservative Parties. The same day, they met the General Council of the Trade Union Congress. Mr. Henderson discussed the situation with the National Executive of the Labour Party, and, on the strength of the Chancellor's statement that a cut in unemployment benefit was not a part of the Government's proposals, he gave an assurance to that effect to the Executive and was supported by Mr. Clynes.

The Cabinet met again in the evening and received reports of the day's meetings. They also received a report of a sub-committee on unemployment insurance, which stated that, even if further adjustments to save the financial situation were made, a considerable sum (19½ millions) would still remain to be found. Next morning the Cabinet met, and the Prime Minister reported on the conference with the Council of the Trade Union Congress. He indicated that they had made some criticism of many of the economies proposed. He also told the Cabinet that the T.U.C. had made some alternative

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suggestions. The Cabinet then proceeded to discuss the cuts in the rates of unemployment benefit ; but, as a substantial majority was against any alteration, the question was dropped. During later stages in the discussion, reference was made to the raising of additional revenue, mostly by direct taxation, as a necessary condition to any agreement on other economies. Again and again the question of the remission of the Sinking Fund was raised, but the Chancellor repelled any such suggestion as absolutely impracticable. The question of a revenue tariff was no longer pressed.

After another discussion on the next day, in which the Cabinet made a final review of every possible economy, the figure of 56 millions was provisionally agreed upon. It was then decided that the Prime Minister should see the Opposition leaders to report this decision to them and find out if such a colossal sum would gain their support.

The Cabinet was summoned to meet on 22 August, and the Prime Minister, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave a report of their interview with the other political leaders. *The Prime Minister stated that the Liberal and Conservative leaders had decided that the 56 millions provisionally agreed upon by the Labour Cabinet, was not enough and demanded further economies amounting to 25 or 30 millions, the bulk of which was to be found out of unemployment insurance.* The Chancellor of the Exchequer corroborated this statement. The Prime Minister also surprised the Cabinet by informing them that the Opposition leaders had suggested that he should see the King. This was a most unexpected statement, and, in making it, MacDonald revealed more than he realized.

During the Cabinet discussions, the question of a Coalition Government was raised. Later, this question was raised again by the Prime Minister. There was a general feeling against either a Coalition Government or a National Government composed of all three Parties. It is interesting to note that Snowden put on record his view that the Cabinet would be unanimous against the formation of such a government, by whatever name it was called.

This rejection of so great a concession as 56 millions was a tremendous blow to the Cabinet. It amounted to an ultimatum, as the only alternative was declared to be a moratorium

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by 26 August. Never had the Cabinet been placed in a more grave dilemma. A keen and momentous discussion took place. The Cabinet realized that they were in the hands of the Opposition leaders, as by combining in the House of Commons they could out-vote the Labour Party. Their consent was, therefore, necessary to any decision. It was agreed that the Opposition leaders should be seen, and the Prime Minister was asked to find out what were the minimum terms that they would accept.

What was the position that faced the Labour Cabinet as they heard the Prime Minister's report of the demands of the Liberal and Conservative leaders? It must be remembered that the Labour Government admitted the gravity of the crisis. They realized, moreover, how terrible might be the consequences of a financial crash in this country. They could appreciate only too well how such a calamity would hit the working classes. How to avoid it? The Budget must be balanced. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had told them that the foreign bankers who were to be asked to lend their money had made that a first essential condition. The Labour Government agreed at once. Indeed, since the publication of the May Report, with its disclosures of 120 millions deficit, each member of it had been anxiously overhauling the expenditure in his own department, for the purpose of finding what possible economies could be effected. Not only so, but the special *ad hoc* committee of the Cabinet had spent four days studying the financial statement supplied by the Treasury which tabulated every possible saving. Then came the special meetings of the full Cabinet. For three days they had sought to reach agreement. That they fully realized the urgent need was evident from the fact that they had suggested the enormous figure of 56 millions.

Now on the Saturday morning of 22 August, the Prime Minister's statement had upset everything. If the Prime Minister had reported truly, the representatives of the Conservative and Liberal parties were not so anxious to balance the Budget as to balance it in a way that would suit their political and economic policy. There were many ways in which the Budget could have been balanced. Whatever method was adopted by the negotiators would have to run the gauntlet



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of the House of Commons. The difficulty was to get a method that would satisfy both sides. There are two points of view. Nothing shows this more than the fact that every Finance Bill debate is a battleground between the defenders of the direct tax-payers on the one hand and of the indirect tax-payers on the other. The Conservative and Liberal leaders were determined that the method chosen would be one that would call for the least sacrifice from the class whose interests it was their special concern to protect.

No drastic economies, no wage cuts, nothing would avail unless the savings included a savage cut in unemployment benefit. To the majority of the Labour Cabinet this was an attack on the working classes. A cut of 10 per cent meant that the benefit of an unemployed man with a wife and two children would be reduced from 30s. to 27s. per week. To do this would mean a definite lowering of their standard of life. For hundreds of thousands of the poorest of the poor it meant serious hardship and hopeless misery. No burden on the wealthier classes, no cut in the income of the salaried class is in any way comparable with that which drives down the unemployed from poverty to privation. The majority of the Labour Cabinet believed that. To speak of 'equality of sacrifice' in this connection was the most shameless hypocrisy. If the Prime Minister had told the truth, it meant that these political leaders were willing to risk disaster for purposes of political strategy.

It was a serious choice that lay before those members of the Labour Cabinet. They had tasted the sweets of Office, many of them for the first time. They were men, for the most part, who had risen from poverty to the honour and prestige of the British Cabinet. Now they were to sacrifice all on a question of principle. They knew only too well how easy it was by the strategy of panic and the use of propaganda to misrepresent their motives and stir the public to condemn their action. They could easily find many reasons for holding on to Office; but to have done so would have been a betrayal of their faith. They realized that their decision to stand by the unemployed meant political suicide. They were prepared to make that sacrifice.

When the Cabinet met on Sunday evening at 10 Downing

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Street, the Prime Minister made a speech repeating what he alleged were the demands of the Opposition leaders. It was gathered from a very guarded written statement that was read to the Cabinet that New York would not be satisfied without a 10 per cent cut in unemployment benefit, but might agree if it were included.

It is of supreme importance to note that MacDonald definitely declared to the Labour Cabinet that the Conservative and Liberal leaders had given their ultimatum that, in addition to the 56 millions provisionally agreed upon, a further sum of 25 or 30 millions must be found, mainly from unemployment insurance.

Up to this moment the Labour Cabinet believed that MacDonald, rather than submit to the dictation of the bankers, who were really the wire-pullers in this business, would resign and take his place alongside his colleagues and oppose with them an attack on the standard of life of the poor, which he must have known to be unjust and intolerable. He had, in fact, assured them that all must stand together.

During these final and critical meetings when a definite split had appeared, with the Prime Minister, Snowden and Thomas on one side and the rest of the Cabinet on the other, there was evidence of a change in the demeanour of MacDonald. It appeared that, having delivered the alleged ultimatum of the Liberal and Conservative leaders on the question of unemployment benefit, he seemed to be merely waiting for a complete deadlock to arise. He had no advice to give, no recommendations to make, nothing helpful to add. He seemed to drop out of the discussion and to be waiting wearily for the anticipated deadlock. While the rest of the Cabinet were at their wits' end suggesting, proposing, discussing, MacDonald sat absent-mindedly 'doodling' on a blotter. When the final discussion on that fateful Sunday night ended in a complete failure to reach agreement, MacDonald acted in a way that revealed that this development had been expected and duly provided for. He suddenly sprang a surprise on the Cabinet. He put before them another ultimatum; this time his own: either accept the cut in unemployment benefit or resign from the Cabinet. As by the Constitution the life of a government is in the hands of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet

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had no option but to consent to the cuts in unemployment benefit or give up their posts in the Government.

When he had their resignations in his hands, he rose hastily from the table and announced that he would at once seek an audience with the King, inform His Majesty of what had occurred and advise him to call a conference of Mr. Baldwin, Sir Herbert Samuel, and himself for the following day. It should be noted that before MacDonald demanded the resignation of his Labour colleagues, he knew definitely from Mr. Baldwin and Sir Herbert Samuel what the attitude of their respective parties would be towards him and the proposed National Government.

The members of the Labour Cabinet naturally assumed on that Sunday night, 23 August, that Mr. Baldwin would be asked to form a government. But it is significant that MacDonald had something quite different in view. Without a word of consultation with his Cabinet colleagues, without even informing them of his intention to set up a National Government with himself as Prime Minister, he proceeded to carry out his long-thought-out plan.

Snowden throws a side-light on MacDonald's attitude at this time :

'When the Labour Cabinet as a whole declined to agree to a reduction of unemployment pay, Mr. MacDonald assumed too hurriedly that this involved the resignation of his Government. He neither showed nor expressed any grief at this regrettable development. On the contrary, he set about the formation of the National Government with an enthusiasm which showed that the adventure was highly agreeable to him.'<sup>1</sup>

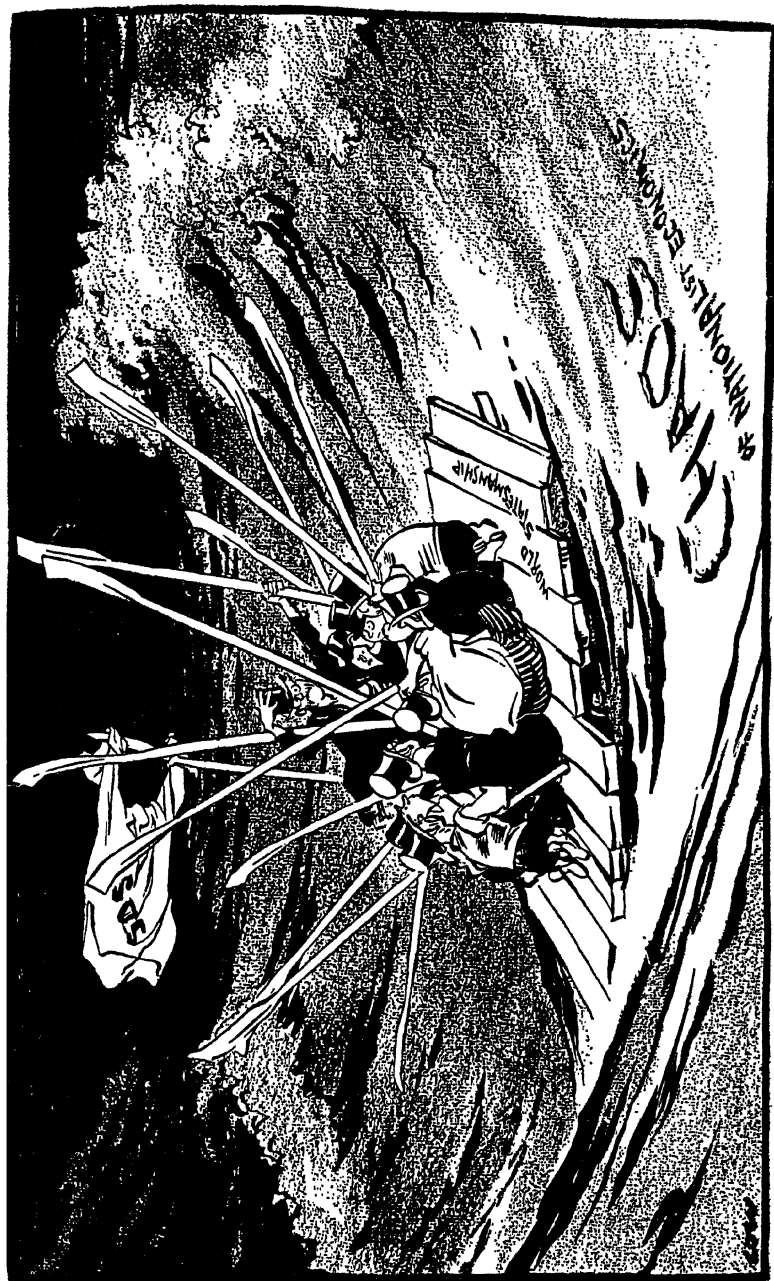
It was, therefore, amazing to them that, when the Cabinet assembled next morning, MacDonald came in and announced to them that a new government had been formed—in short, *that he was in and they were out*. He went on to explain that he had consented to be head of a government which included members of the Conservative and Liberal Parties. It was to be a co-operation of persons—not a coalition of parties. The business of the new Government would be confined to dealing

<sup>1</sup> *An Autobiography*, by Philip Viscount Snowden, (p. 953).

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with the emergency, though the London Passenger Transport Bill might be passed and perhaps some measures of a non-controversial kind. Its emergency programme would be within the lines of the tentative proposals which had been discussed, including some such adjustment of the Sinking Fund as the financial authorities might agree to.

The impression left on the minds of those who heard that speech, after the first sensations of surprise had passed, was that the whole thing had been arranged long before and that, while in Cabinet and Committee they had been making panic-stricken efforts to balance the Budget, the whole business had been humbug and make-believe.



CONFERENCE TO DECIDE WHETHER EVERYONE SHALL PULL TOGETHER.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

### *THE JUNIOR LABOUR MINISTERS*

On the afternoon of Monday, 24 August 1931 the day on which the Prime Minister resigned, there was a meeting of Junior Ministers at No. 10 Downing Street. The sensational happenings of the week-end added an electric atmosphere to this meeting. There were few absentees. It was held in the historic Cabinet Room.

When MacDonald took his seat as Chairman, his lips smiled, but his eyes had an excited look. Seeing the smile, someone remarked: "Well, Mr. Prime Minister, you're looking happy."

"I am happy," he replied with a nervous laugh. "You see I am going out." Then he turned to business. He told the gathering that he had originally called them together for the purpose of informing them of the nature of the 'cut' to be imposed on Ministerial salaries, but other developments had created a situation in which they had no salaries at all. He assured them that he had never felt happier in his life than in the position in which he found himself now as the head of the National Government.

Then he proceeded to give a long explanation of what had happened. He assured them that the crisis was not a ramp of the Bank of England. The reason for the crisis was that there had been propaganda against Great Britain. France had been particularly active against us, but had changed her plan after the Seven Power Conference. The United States also had become bitterly opposed to us. Things had moved rapidly since the unfortunate publication of the May Report. That document complicated the whole situation. After the May Report the withdrawals of foreign deposits began. The newspapers made conditions far worse. A moratorium would have been necessary, and the Bank of England had demanded

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it. The Bank was told that a moratorium was impossible, but the Economic Committee examined the May Report, and it was finally agreed that an immediate loan was necessary. The Bank of England said that the Cabinet proposals were inadequate to raise a loan and that the defects in our financial position were beginning to be known. 'We were actually losing £X a day,' the value of X being too serious even to mention.

He emphasized the fact that there had been agreement in the Cabinet or the possibility of agreement on all the proposals, except the cut in unemployment benefit. The Cabinet accepted the necessity of cuts in the salaries of teachers, police, and Cabinet Ministers, but even on these there were serious divisions within the Cabinet. Some members were prepared to face the facts. Cuts in teachers' salaries, etc. were impossible unless unemployment benefit was also cut, and the proposal in this connection was to put unemployment benefit at what it had been two years ago, which was equivalent to a 10 per cent cut.

The Prime Minister then told the story of a Minister who had come to see him, who said he was not prepared to accept a 10 per cent cut in his salary, while the unemployed had no cut in their benefit which they received for doing nothing.

MacDonald proceeded to justify the cut by saying that he understood that a great many of the workers themselves were in favour of it. Then he went on to tell the story of a working man with whom he had been in contact lately. This man was righteously indignant at the position of the unemployed man.

'Surely, sir, you are not going to compel me and workers like me, to suffer a reduction of our already low wages, and at the same time allow these b—— (Mr. MacDonald apologized for repeating the term) to go on drawing the full dole for doing nothing.'

He spoke of the programme of proposed economies having been conveyed to the Bank of England and then to New York and of the reply having come back that such anxiety existed in America regarding the position of the Unemployment Fund in this country that the cut in benefit must be a condition

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of the required assistance being provided. The fear in his mind and Snowden's, based on information supplied by financiers, was of a 'run' on the Bank of England, a 'run' on the Post Office, and the wholesale presentation of War Loan Certificates, against which there was no money available.

The Prime Minister then went on to tell that the situation that morning was much worse, due to the newspapers' disgraceful announcements. The drain of gold had increased. The Prime Minister had decided that, even if it meant his political suicide, he must prevent a financial crash with its effect on the workers and their families. A Coalition Government was out of the question, because it was clear that the Labour Party would refuse its support. He had, therefore, decided to form a personal government, consisting of a few individuals drawn from the various parties, the Government being a non-party government, with very few Ministers, to carry on until the money situation was all right again, and then it would disperse.

He knew that the Junior Ministers would curse him and that it might end his political life, but he would have no buttonholing and no 'caves'; he respected the political intelligence of the Junior Ministers too much to expect that.

When the Prime Minister had completed his statement, his audience sat silent for a few moments, too astonished to speak. Although the main idea of the speech was plain enough, it was very vague on some vital points. So characteristically ambiguous was MacDonald that one questioner asked who would be Prime Minister in the proposed National Government. He said, with a show of reluctance: "Well, I suppose I shall insist on being Prime Minister." The next question was also one of artless ingenuousness: "Then do we carry on in our departments as usual?" There was no reply. The Prime Minister smiled wanly at the questioner.

Then Shinwell's incisive voice was heard, and the Prime Minister turned sharply to hear his question. "Have no alternative courses been suggested?" "What other alternatives are there?" countered the Prime Minister. "Well," persisted Shinwell, "why not leave the other parties to form their own Government?" "Oh, that would not save the country," he replied. "Has the question of raising a domestic



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loan been considered?" he was asked. "Yes, but that was impossible," he replied.

In a final word, very earnestly and impressively he assured them that he did not expect them to follow him. They were all young men with their lives before them. They must think of their careers. They must not risk their future by following him into the wilderness. They would have considerable Party advantages if they were in the Opposition. He had fully safeguarded the position of Labour Members in that there would be no coupon election.

With one of those strange lapses that even the cleverest men make, he did not see that he was claiming for himself a higher moral code than these young Ministers. For him it was the path of duty and the way of sacrifice. But they were young; their motive should be self-interest.

The audacious hypocrisy of MacDonald is shown in the sequel to this meeting, which was an anti-climax, not without its elements of humour. On the day after the meeting, Mr. Shinwell, who as Minister of Mines had been present at the meeting of Junior Ministers, found a very worried Prime Minister on the 'phone, at an extraordinarily early hour in the morning. MacDonald was in a difficulty. Would Shinwell return to his old post, as Minister of Mines in the 'National' Government? Shinwell refused at once. He would stand by the Labour Party. Some time after, the Prime Minister rang up again. This time it was to make another astonishing request. Would Shinwell suggest anyone for the job? Shinwell was somewhat taken aback. He told the Prime Minister that he was afraid he could not advise him. Then the Prime Minister mentioned several names, including that of Mr. Milner Gray.

The bare-faced impudence of MacDonald's sudden *volte-face* amazed Shinwell. Within twenty-four hours of advising him not to endanger his career by joining the 'National' Government, he was earnestly appealing to him to take the opposite course. On Monday, MacDonald, the hero-martyr, was going out into the wilderness alone. On Tuesday, with a complete contempt for consistency, he shamelessly invites Shinwell to commit what he had described as political suicide. Why had he changed his mind? The man whom he had

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originally chosen for the post had refused it, as he had expected something better, and had left the Prime Minister in the lurch.

The fact was that all this talk of their not risking their future was the sheerest humbug. The new Government had to be a three-Party Government, and so he must get rid of two-thirds of his Labour Ministers. Eager young Tories and Liberals were clamouring for jobs. They were already jostling each other outside the Cabinet door. MacDonald had, however, made some miscalculations. He had underestimated the characters of the Labour Ministers. He had been thinking that he would be embarrassed by having too many young aspirants for office in the 'National' Government. Now he was alarmed that there were so few. It was imperative that the spoils of office in the 'National' Government be divided proportionately between the three Parties. It would be very awkward—indeed, if there was superabundance of the other Parties and a significant dearth of Labour representatives, that was why he had 'phoned Shinwell.

They were young men, he had said, with their lives before them, and they must not risk their careers. But his son, Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, was a Junior Minister—the youngest of them all—and his father had no doubt as to what was best for his career. He was to remain steadfastly at his post. Indeed, MacDonald's advice to the Junior Ministers to look to their own interests was the policy which he was following himself. He was taking the course which, he knew, led, not to the wilderness, but to the highest honour in the land, and to claim that he was making any sacrifice was sheer cant and humbug.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

### *MY FINAL INTERVIEW*

When Parliament rose for the summer recess I went to my home in the Hebrides. On 24 August 1931 an urgent telegram from Downing Street called me back to London. Arriving at Downing Street, I saw several notables entering No. 10 ; a meeting of the Cabinet was about to be held. I went into the Secretaries' room and had a talk with Mr. (now Sir Patrick) Duff, principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, and Mr. H. G. Vincent, another secretary. I told them that I had been in the Highlands remote from news ; I was anxious to know all the circumstances, but I had no hesitation as to what course I would take from what I already knew. I had, in fact, come mainly to hand in my resignation to the Prime Minister. They were both convinced that I was making a great mistake and besought me to delay meantime.

At last the Cabinet meeting broke up, and I went into the lounge. The Ministers were standing about, chatting, before going for their hats. It was something of a shock to see so many Tory Ministers in a place that I had so long associated with Labour people. It seemed strange to see Lord Hailsham in Ramsay MacDonald's house, as I could not forget how often and how bitterly he had attacked MacDonald in the House of Commons. Then there was Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who had always treated MacDonald with cold contempt. Sir John Simon, MacDonald's old enemy of the Campbell case, who had, after returning from India, thought himself so unjustly slighted by MacDonald, was also there. I noted that no Labour Ministers were there. Thomas was absent, and Snowden had not yet appeared. At last MacDonald came out of the Cabinet room. I heard his loud staccato laugh before he entered. He was talking to Mr. Baldwin. He looked very nervous ; his face was drawn and haggard. Uneasy he looked, too, with jerky gestures as he spoke.

I was having a word or two with Sir Donald Maclean when I suddenly noticed MacDonald running upstairs. After

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a few minutes I followed. He must have been informed of my intended resignation for when I entered through the high double doors of the gaudy white and gold room, the Prime Minister was sitting at a bureau, smoking as he wrote. "Hello," he cried. "Come in. I believe you are leaving me." "Yes," I answered. He made no comment on my answer. There was an awkward silence. At last, without turning, he said: "You go on talking; I have to finish these as I am going to Lossiemouth by the afternoon train."

The announcement that he was going back to Lossiemouth so soon surprised me. I said so. "Ah, yes," he said wearily, but still without turning, "I must get away. I've had an awful time. I'm very tired. I need a rest." "Then you are not going to the meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party and National Executive to-morrow?" "No," he replied very deliberately, "I am not going to any Labour Party meeting on Friday."

As he went on writing, I began to realize what this meant. It meant a definite break with the Labour Party. Surely he would welcome the opportunity of making his position clear. I reminded him of his power over a conference. Had I not seen him again and again sway a conference to his purpose? Would he not come on Friday and explain? This would be the first meeting of the Labour Party since the crisis and the formation of the 'National' Government. I recalled his hold over the rank and file of the Party. This was to be a meeting of the rank and file. I appealed to his gratitude. I was determined to use every argument to get him to change his mind and meet the Party. "After all," I said, "it was the people who made you Prime Minister."

I had heard that day that some of them were unconvinced and were waiting with an open mind to hear the Government's case. MacDonald was silent, and I began to think that I might succeed in persuading him. "Why not tell them the reason for your action and challenge their verdict? You cannot throw them over without meeting them face to face."

He laid down his pen, turned full round towards me and asked the most candid and revealing question: "Do you think that I am going there to be shot at by those fellows?" Shot at by those fellows! 'Shot at' meant that questions

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might be asked at the meeting. When a leader leaves his own Party, it is but natural that that Party should be fully informed as to the reasons. Mr. Baldwin had met his Party and, after explaining his action, had got their approval, as well he might. The leading Liberals had been kept fully informed of every stage of the negotiations. The Labour Party alone of the three parties was kept in absolute ignorance, and this when it was actually in office.

Why did he refuse to meet his Party face to face? Of course, the chief reason was that he knew exactly what he had done, and he feared that they would know it too. He knew that his conduct was indefensible. He feared to face his former colleagues, many of whom held the opinion that he would do just this thing—sell himself to the enemy. He feared that his case for the 'National' Government might be smashed under cross-examination. There were questions that he could not answer—questions that he dare not answer.

It was absolutely essential to his purpose at that time that he should not be openly repudiated by the Party. It was imperative that he should isolate the Labour Cabinet and claim that he had a large following among the rank and file. His plea was that it was only a small remnant of the Labour Party that was opposed to him. Any public repudiation would be very awkward. If he went to the meeting and a motion of expulsion were carried, he would have to resign and could no longer claim to represent the Labour Party in a 'National' Government. He dared not take the risk.

"You see I can't," he answered fretfully. "I must get to Lossiemouth. I have arranged to leave London this afternoon." Seven million people had voted for Labour at the General Election. Now the leader of those millions preferred a holiday in Lossiemouth to facing those who had supported him for thirty years. The four-thirty for Lossiemouth! That had been a joke in Whitehall for years.

"Could you not wait another day?" I asked. "You could get off the next day." A day's delay! He jerked his head petulantly. "No, I am going this afternoon." I pleaded with him, but in vain. His mind was definitely made up, and he did not want to talk about it. Nor did I. I wanted to talk of something far more important. The leader of the

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British Labour Party had deliberately joined his political opponents, and I was anxious to hear from his own lips the inside story. Why had he done this thing?

I did not need to ask. He knew what I wanted to know. Up till then he had been sitting at the bureau, smoking and writing as he talked. At length he rose from his chair, took another cigarette from a yellow packet, lit it, and went over slowly towards the hearth. I followed. His face had a drawn, anxious look. He seemed overburdened, as he sagged into a low, easy-chair. He was silent for a bit, and then he pulled himself together and spoke: "Well, there it is. There was no other way." "Are you sure of that?" I asked. "Absolutely," he answered, "we were at a dead end."

His main indictment was against the bankers—and foreign bankers at that. The French and American bankers had dictated their terms. I did not know then that this definite statement was false and so could not contradict it. Surely it was an extraordinary position for the foreign countries to take up. His answer was that feeling towards Britain had changed. In France there had been for some weeks a strong anti-British propaganda in the French Press, and some of our own newspapers had, to say the least, not been helpful. This had caused something of a panic on the Bourse, and the exchange was going heavily against us. But I remembered how close and cordial was the relationship between MacDonald and the French delegates. I knew, too, how closely the French Treasury and the French financiers worked together.

"Look here," I said, "there is one thing that puzzles me. How can France and America turn round and act this way towards Britain? It is not three weeks since you presided at a Conference of the Seven Great Powers and they solemnly pledged themselves to come to the financial assistance of Germany, the supreme enemy in the War, and save her from collapse. And now France and America are prepared to stand by and see Britain, their ally, crash to disaster, unless she agrees to many humiliating conditions." The story, as MacDonald told it to me on that afternoon in Downing Street, was that this country was within two or three days of collapse. What gave urgency to the affair was the fact that the Bank of England was losing gold so rapidly that there would not be

## *MY FINAL INTERVIEW*

the necessary £12,000,000 for unemployment insurance payments, which must be found by Friday. France and America were making demands that must be met, and, as the Labour Government had refused to agree, the 'National' Government had to be formed.

I heard MacDonald speak afterwards in the House of Commons, and I read his speeches in the country during the election, but in none of these did he go so far in denouncing the French and American bankers for their demands, as he did to me privately in Downing Street. It was a bold thing for MacDonald to do—this charging of France and America with dictation. It was a gigantic bluff. He knew that he was running the risk of its being called on both sides of the Atlantic. Mr. Tom Johnston, in the House of Commons, exposed the misrepresentations as far as France was concerned, and Mr. Harrison denied the American part of the story. Both these repudiations, however, were only known afterwards, too late to save the Labour Government.

Then I turned the conversation to another point. "Why was it that, in this tremendous crisis, you did not summon Parliament and tell the world what was happening?" "There was no time," he said. "Prompt action had to be taken to prevent the disaster of going off gold."

There was one statement during this interview that MacDonald made with deliberate emphasis. It was that the Cabinet had unanimously agreed to all the cuts, including the cut on unemployment benefit. "They were prepared," he said, "to go all the way until the T.U.C. intervened." In the House of Commons, later, Henderson exposed this misrepresentation. This reference to the voting of the Ministers was, if it were true, a revelation of a Cabinet secret.

Then he changed the subject. The reason he had sent for me he said was to offer me a post. Would I not join him? It would be to my advantage in every way. My job as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister had always been regarded as in the direct line of promotion. How grateful he was for all I had done. If I joined him he would be able to make some recompense for my years of service.

My refusal was as brief as it was definite. I believe he meant his offer seriously, but what surprised me was that he should

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have thought my acceptance possible. When he saw that I was not to be persuaded he proceeded to tell me of the large number of notables that had offered him their support.

Of the T.U.C. he spoke in terms of scorn. 'Poor-Law Socialists,' he called them, 'who sought to dictate to the country.' "How are you getting on with your new colleagues?" I asked, thinking of this Labour leader presiding over a Tory-Liberal Cabinet. He smiled. "Oh, all right," he answered. He did not seem enthusiastic. The question was awkward. He was silent for a moment. Then a thought seemed to strike him. There was an angry flicker in his eyes as he said something that took my breath away: "Some of them are trying to force my hand. They were trying their Tory tricks in the Cabinet this morning. But I will let them see that I am head of a National Government, and I will stand no nonsense."

He was speaking more to himself than to me.

I could readily realize what was happening. The squabble between the Liberal Free Traders and the Conservative Protectionists had begun, and MacDonald was being ignored. His pride was hurt, and he spoke resentfully. During the days that followed, this dissension in the Cabinet increased. It worried MacDonald so much that he made several references to it in his election speeches.

I did not realize that this was the end of our association. I had been Parliamentary Private Secretary to MacDonald for eight years, for it was in the hectic days of 1924, when MacDonald was enjoying the sweets of office for the first time, that I went to Downing Street. I was a little bewildered. It was so difficult at that time to believe that the leader of the Labour Party, one of its founders, should so ruthlessly destroy it.

I had heard his story. I did not then know all the facts, but I believed then, as I know now, that the anti-Labour politicians and the financial-politicals, not of France or America, but of Britain, had got the Government in a corner. What I wanted to find out was whether or not MacDonald was the great deliverer that he had been acclaimed in the Press or was a partner in a great imposture, exploiting a national emergency to his personal advantage.

I could not make up my mind that day. I am sorry, for several reasons, that I have no doubt now.



## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

### *WAS LABOUR GOVERNMENT TO BLAME FOR THE CRISIS?*

**M**r. Ramsay MacDonald began his last session as Labour Prime Minister with a New Year message given in an interview to the *Daily Herald*.

‘It has been,’ he said, ‘a hard year. Never before in the history of the world has there been such a tragic demonstration of the truth of the Socialist case that the machinery of Capitalism is bound to break down. The troubles from which we have been suffering in the year that has passed have had nothing to do with any failure in production. Nature has not failed; nor has man. What we have witnessed is a complete failure of the whole of the mechanism of exchange. Catastrophe has come upon us from finance, from that complicated system of credit and currency which, in its relation to production, has been dislocated to an alarming extent. A few financiers in New York or London or Paris, pursuing their own ends and looking after their own fortunes, are able to destroy the fruits of good harvests and the productive accomplishments of human energy. As a result, prices fall, a sense of insecurity spreads, and the world goes down steadily into the darkest depression.

Fortunately, there are a good many signs that we have reached bottom and that an upward move is beginning. If there are no further interruptions, and if the gambling in values does not again intervene, there is every hope that, during the coming year, the machinery of exchange, involving as it does both production and consumption, will be working normally again.’

This statement shows that the Prime Minister recognized that the depression was due to financial jugglery.

‘A few financiers in New York or London or Paris, pursuing their own ends and looking after their own fortunes,

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are able to destroy the fruits of good harvests and the productive accomplishments of human energy.'

If that statement were true in January 1931, it had all the more significance seven months later when the Labour Government was destroyed. Was there dictation from the banks? The facts themselves give the answer. During the early months of 1931, when the bank rate was only two and a half per cent, and prices in the Consols market had reached the highest level touched since the return to the gold standard in April 1925, Snowden had a big chance to pull off a successful conversion. This was not done at that time because the Treasury, with a complete lack of foresight and in spite of every sign to the contrary, expected a fall to two per cent in the bank rate and still more favourable conditions later on. Of course, as any child could have foreseen, the conditions in Europe made this impossible. The German financial crisis disturbed confidence, and the British bank rate was forced up to four and a half per cent. But no country can go on paying five per cent to the holders of £2,000,000,000, while it proposes to cut the insurance benefit of the unemployed man. The very exigencies of the situation call for a lightening of this enormous burden. Most of this five per cent War Loan was held by banks, financial houses, insurance companies, and investment trusts, and the Chancellor was practically in the hands of these institutions if he wished to carry through a successful conversion scheme. The financiers were also politicians and Conservative politicians at that. They saw their chance of coercing the Government. They put forward their policy—the policy of economy advocated by the Conservative Party in the House of Commons and afterwards set out in detail in the May Report.

This was the first attempt at dictation. The Government would have to accept these political demands of the bankers or the Chancellor would not get his conversion scheme. The Chancellor abandoned his Conversion Loan scheme, but the bankers did not give up their campaign. On the contrary, they merely changed their tactics and adopted a more subtle and successful strategy. Eagerly accepting the May Report with its partisan attack on the Labour Government, they ex-

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ploited the international situation to their purpose and declared the Government responsible for the crisis. The 'Penguins of the City' showed a remarkable ingenuity in this attack on the Labour Government.

Here a strange fact emerged. Although publicly they blamed the Labour Government as the cause of the crisis, privately they made no such charge. In their own publications they exonerated the Labour Government from any blame. Perhaps the reason for this extraordinary candour lies in the fact that their Bank Reviews are privately printed and have but a limited circulation. In the *Westminster Bank Review* for October 1931 there is an illuminating paragraph which completely exonerates the Labour Government :

'The immediate cause of the breakdown,' it says, 'may have been the immobilization of British advances to Germany at a period when lack of confidence abroad had produced a general movement towards repatriation of balances loaned to London as the most active international centre. But by every criterion of a century's practical experience, London's position was sound, given normal conditions. Neither to Germany nor to any other country had she advanced more than was judicious, having regard to all the known facts. The crisis grew out of the distrust by many nations of their own position, as regards their international obligations, and, in consequence, it is an open question whether the pound sterling could have been saved, even had the internal policy of Great Britain been conducted with the wisdom of Diogenes, the statesmanship of Pericles, and the strength of Cæsar.'

More outspoken still is Mr. F. C. Tiarks, the well-known banker, a partner of J. Henry Schröder & Co. and director of the Bank of England. Writing in the *Quarterly Review* of Schröder's Bank, he says :

'Those who like to look for political causes of financial movements have found, in this Continental drain of gold, material for attacks on the present British Government, arguing that French holders of London balances were glad, by withdrawing them, to embarrass Mr. Snowden and also that the thriftless conduct of British finance had alarmed

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foreign holders of sterling concerning the strength of the pound. The real cause of the drain, however, seems to have been the highly nervous state of mind prevalent on the Continent concerning the possible results of the run on Germany and especially its reactions on London as a large creditor of Germany. Currency hoarding, and gold hoarding when any gold could be got, on the part of the Continental public was further frightening the banks abroad and making them eager to strengthen themselves by bringing home their London balances. These influences may fully account for the drain on London, which finally brought the Bank of France and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York to array themselves in line with the Bank of England, by providing it with a credit of £50,000,000 and giving the world a timely lesson in international co-operation.'

When MacDonald denounced the Labour Government during the election campaign and blamed it for the crisis, he was on safe ground. The miners of Seaham were not likely to read Bank Reviews.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

### *DID FRANCE AND AMERICA DICTATE?*

The one circumstance that gave the situation its emergency, its critical characteristic was 'the drain of gold.' The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had accepted the responsibility for these withdrawals of gold from the Bank of England. First of all to the Cabinet and afterwards in the House of Commons, when defending his action in forming a 'National' Government, MacDonald declared that the loss of confidence in Britain's financial stability, which had led to the drain of gold, was due to the revelations of the May Report. The terrifying forecast of a deficit of 120 millions in the Budget, which the Chancellor was to present six months later, had so scared the French investor who had evidently been studying with anxious misgivings the May Report, that he had to withdraw his investments home from London.

To say that the disclosures of the May Report led to the flow of gold from London, in addition to being a most damaging confession, was a complete misrepresentation. The lamb in the fable could not be guilty of polluting the water last year, because it was not born last year. The May Report could not have caused the flow of gold from London, because it was not born until about a month after the drain had begun. No one knew better than MacDonald, who had been Chairman of the Seven Power Conference, that the political and economic reasons that lay close behind the French withdrawal of gold were wholly unconnected with the May Report or the Labour Government.

If fear of Britain's financial collapse as a result of the extravagance of the Labour Government were not the real cause of the drain of gold, what, then, was the real cause? Before dealing with major causes, it is well to note an incidental phenomenon of interesting significance. It has been pointed

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out that there are always withdrawals of gold from London before every international conference. When the Hague Conference was held in 1929, there were heavy withdrawals of gold. When the Naval Conference was held in 1930, there were similar large withdrawals of gold from London. The reason for this is plain. London was the money market of the world. The mechanism of finance is always the most susceptible and delicate machine in the world. It is influenced by economic, physical, political, and even psychological factors. An idle rumour, an indiscreet remark by a politician, a sudden death, may affect the money market enormously, because people read into them some hidden purpose or result. If these things affect the money market, how much more the deliberation of an international conference! If the annual meeting of a private company can affect prices, a meeting of representatives of the great Powers cannot be without the fear of change.

The Seven Power Conference revealed in blackest hues the terrible picture of Germany's approaching default and even bankruptcy. As the very fact that an international conference is being held presupposes a crisis of some kind, so, while the outcome is uncertain, it is safer for investors to recall their capital to their own control.

Although it would be expecting too much to hope that the French financiers would admit a political reason for their action, yet undoubtedly France's attitude towards Germany was a most important factor. France expected and, in the opinion of some neutral observers, hoped for the collapse of Germany. This was not, primarily, from any causeless malignity or hostility to Germany, but was due rather to one of the most fundamental emotions of human life—fear. France feared a restored and re-established Germany. A weakened Germany would be less dangerous. That is why, at the Seven Power Conference, her representatives heard unmoved the eloquent pleading of the German Chancellor. Sympathy, yes; condolence, yes; help, none. France believed that she could afford to bide her time. She would tame Germany as the larger carnivora are tamed, by starvation. Her political and financial policy would be framed to this end. But no other country, however philanthropically minded, must interfere.

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If Germany was to be weakened, there must be no loans from London to Berlin. Any help to Germany would delay or prevent her surrender to France. If, on the other hand, financial help was not forthcoming, the French financiers saw the danger to their securities in London. A crash in Germany would at once have repercussions in London. London banks might be badly hit, and the large French deposits there might be placed in jeopardy. It is natural to call your resources home, if danger threatens. It is not well to have your ships at sea when a storm breaks. Thus it happened that loyalty to their country's policy and regard for their private interests alike dictated the withdrawal of gold from London. Prudence and patriotism united to the disadvantage of Britain.

That the French financiers accepted and supported this policy was the opinion of Mr. J. L. Garvin. It is interesting to note that Mr. Garvin had no illusions as to the cause of the drain of gold. Writing in the *Observer*, he said that it was due to political reasons that France wished to compel Great Britain to support her policy with regard to Germany, and the withdrawals of gold by French houses from London was in pursuance of this policy. He said that France's policy of an economic blockade of Germany was 'backed by patriotic finance in a way that the world has never before noticed in time of peace.' Again the same author wrote :

'Last week France was ready to join in giving full financial relief to the Reich on the terms of a "second Versailles" involving political degradation. Though the conditions could not be accepted by Chancellor Brüning—not to speak of President Hindenburg—France expects to receive Germany's surrender in three months. The Paris Press asserts and believes that Britain and America can do nothing without France. The immense withdrawals of French money from the City of London last week were undoubtedly connected with the idea of making Britain feel that, unless she conforms to French policy, it will be the worse for her. Britain never will conform to that policy. It is a question that may go far to alter the whole existing political situation in this country before next autumn is over.'

This well informed writer saw that a European crisis was

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imminent, not because of any action of the British Labour Government but because of an upheaval in Germany.

The Paris Press at that time were confident that, if financial aid were not forthcoming from Britain and America, Germany before three months had passed would be willing to accept the French terms. If the Seven Power Conference had been successful, the danger of a German collapse would have been removed, and one of the economic reasons for the withdrawal would have been dispelled. As the Conference was purely financial, the political issues were not discussed. As the Conference failed, the financial position in Germany was as ominous as ever. After the Conference closed its doors, amid the mutual felicitations of all the delegates, Britain's serious financial position remained ; indeed, it was worsened by the new commitments undertaken on behalf of Germany.

Then it came to pass that Mr. Montagu Norman whispered in the Premier's ear the tremendous tidings of the flow of gold. South from London, across the Channel, went first a mere golden trickle ; then a stream. The coffers at Threadneedle Street were rapidly emptying, and the Governor, by the working of the gold standard, his cherished Procrustean law, had to give solid gold to any who could produce paper credentials. He had already borrowed £50,000,000 from America and France. That was nearly exhausted, he said. There must be another loan to replenish the vaults.

‘ The financial situation,’ said MacDonald, ‘ had worked itself out, all things had been considered carefully, out and in, back and forward, up and down, and analysed ; but it was perfectly clear that what had to be secured, and the first goal that had to be reached was a loan.’

As the Bank of England could not raise that loan, the Labour Government must do the borrowing. So the British Cabinet was called together. They learned with dismay that France and America refused to lend, unless on certain specified conditions. France, it was alleged, was demanding, as a condition of lending her gold, that Great Britain balanced her Budget, and America was insisting that unemployment insurance benefit should be reduced. That was the bankers' ultimatum



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to the Labour Government. If it is true that the bankers of France and America did really make those political demands upon a country with the reputation of Great Britain, then it was a piece of insolent and intolerable impertinence. The balancing of its Budget is the business for the British House of Commons. It is purely a matter of domestic finance. If it is not true that France and America made these demands, then those who said that they did were guilty of the most contemptible deception. We now know that the bankers of France did not lay it down, as a condition of granting a loan, that Great Britain should balance her Budget. The audacity of this charge against France is amazing. It could so easily and so quickly have been proved untrue. Indeed, its very effrontery was its safety, for no one would believe that anyone would be so rash as to risk exposure.

It can readily be realized that both France and the United States, being on the gold standard, would be anxious for Britain to remain on that standard, especially in the interests of their export trade. The prospect of Britain going off the gold standard would be so alarming that they would do anything to prevent it. The French bankers were specially anxious to lend money to Britain for another reason. If Britain had to borrow money from France for her own uses, there was less chance of British money going to Germany. At the Seven Power Conference, the financial chiefs of France met the heads of the British Treasury on terms of almost affectionate cordiality. Three weeks afterwards, these French statesmen were alleged to have turned completely round and were willing to see their old ally meet with disaster.

Mr. Arthur Henderson, the Foreign Secretary, who was in daily communication with France, absolutely repudiated the suggestion. He said in the House of Commons :

‘ My belief in the interdependence of international finance led me to this conclusion—that, however threatening the situation might be in their own interests, they never dared to have allowed the things to come to pass that had been brought to our notice.’

Another complete rebuttal of this charge against France

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was given by Mr. Tom Johnston, at that time Lord Privy Seal. He said :

‘ I do not believe that it was the French who insisted upon it as a condition of a loan. I never believed that it was the French, and I do not believe it now. I had the privilege of a long conversation with M. Flandin, the French Chancellor of the Exchequer, at the French Ministry of Finance, in the first week of August, and he told me then that, so far from desiring to do anything to collapse the pound, he was prepared to do anything and everything in his power to save it, because he knew that the franc might be hit next. He never made any reference whatever to conditions about unemployment benefit ; he never suggested any ten per cent cut ; and I would ask in justice to the French Government : “ Will any statement be made publicly as to whether Flandin ever at any time, as representing France, insisted upon any cut in unemployment benefits in this country ? ” For my part I do not believe it.’

There is a sinister side to this business. The French bankers were very hopeful that the British loan would be issued in Paris, and preparations were actually being made to that end. Suddenly it was reported that the British Treasury had vetoed a French loan. The effect of this on financial circles in Paris was sensational. The Paris correspondents of British newspapers sent their anxious protests across the Channel.

What was the meaning of this strange action on the part of the Treasury, they asked. The *Glasgow Herald* had the following from its Paris correspondent :

‘ France and the Bank of England. Pained surprise at British attitude. The optimism which was the keynote of Paris financial circles yesterday cooled down somewhat to-day and was replaced by a feeling of pained surprise at the British attitude. The announcement yesterday that an agreement had been virtually completed between the Banks of England and France for a credit of £20,000,000 for rediscount purposes was received with acclamation, but, when it was learned to-day that the arrangement was hanging fire owing to the reported opposition of the British Treasury, the

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enthusiasm was considerably damped. The British hesitation to accept French financial assistance was attributed to *amour propre*, but, according to the view expressed here, it can be in no way humiliating for the City to "grasp the hand which France is stretching out to it." The absolute soundness of the Bank of England's credit and the world-wide predominance of British banking are not for one moment questioned in Paris. The French are distinctly hurt by insinuations put forward in the British Press that France is seeking to weaken Great Britain's financial position. The exact contrary is true, it is declared, for the French are imbued with the strongest desire to help unstintingly in accordance with the long-standing tradition of co-operation between the banks of London and Paris.'

The truth behind the news was that, as it was essential to the success of the conspiracy that France should be described as unwilling to lend any money, it would be very awkward if she began offering a loan. A loan from Paris, even the offer of a loan, would have ruined the scheme. This was no doubt the reason for the propaganda of disparagement that, at that time, so mysteriously arose in Paris.

That the Federal Reserve Bank of America had also refused a loan to Britain was a particularly mean and mischievous misrepresentation. The fact was that America had never been asked for a loan. Mr. Harrison, the Chairman, repudiated indignantly any suggestion of interference with British domestic political policy and vehemently contradicted any hostility to the Labour Government, and declared that he did not know that Britain wanted a loan, as the first loan was not yet exhausted. This is an obviously honest statement of the case. In view of the very friendly relations between Britain and America, to say that America sought to dictate political terms for a financial credit was a monstrous suggestion.

Mr. Tom Johnston, speaking in the House of Commons of the crowning incident of a dramatic series, said :

' One of the memories in recent months that abides with me, and I hope I shall never forget it, is that of twenty men and one woman, representing the Government of this country standing one black Sunday evening in a Downing Street

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garden, awaiting a cable from New York as to whether the pound was to be saved or not, and whether the condition would be insisted upon that the unemployed would be cut ten per cent. I asked an honourable friend of mine—a Conservative Member of this House—privately, the other day, what would he say, what would he do, what would be his reaction, if a group of foreign financiers said to him and his Party : “ You must cut the Navy ten per cent, or twenty-five per cent, as a condition precedent to your financial system being allowed to continue ? ” What would he say ? (An hon. Member : “ Tell them to go to hell.”) That is the answer that he would give—that he would see them in hell first. That is the answer that I give, for my part, to every group of financiers, home and foreign, who attempt to dictate to the Commons of this country how they shall or shall not treat their unemployed fellow-citizens.’

The scene had an Edgar Wallace touch that would particularly appeal to MacDonald. The British Cabinet were seated round the table in the memorable Cabinet room of No. 10 Downing Street. They were desperately endeavouring to find a formula that would meet the harsh terms of the American money-lenders. At last, they reached agreement on a proposal. MacDonald then adjourned the Cabinet in order, as he said, that he might find out if those terms would be accepted by America. The British Cabinet wandered out into the garden and waited while a call was put through to New York. Mr. Harrison of the Federal Reserve Bank was asked if he would accept the British Government’s proposals. When the reply came back, it was a rejection. America would not lend, unless the unemployment benefit rate was reduced.

It was not until some time afterwards that the British Cabinet found out that they had been hoaxed. The whole business was what is called in the American vernacular a ‘ frame-up.’

MEETING...  
OF LOYAL CONSERVATIVES  
OF BALDWIN  
AND STANLEY (has a copy?)



You must be well aware that during recent months Mr. Baldwin said he would retire and "leave the responsibility to others."

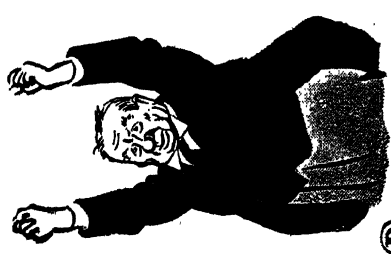


(A) if he lost Davidson—  
if he had to work with Lord Beaverbrook—



(B) if he did not have the Party behind him—

(C) if he had to adopt the "free hand."



(D) if there was to be any "niggling" about India.

so it is perfectly evident to loyal believers in dear old Stanley like Low, that he resigned ages ago, and is now back with his pigs and pipes. That affair you will hear at the meeting will be probably a waxwork hired for the occasion by a craven Central Office afraid to face the truth.



LOW

# THE BALDWIN MYSTERY.

## CHAPTER FIFTY

### *THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALE*

**I**t was to the Cabinet sub-committee on Economy that the Prime Minister gave the first version of his story. As he told it with all the force of epic drama, it shocked and astonished his simple-minded colleagues. Great Britain was on the edge of ruin; there was a deficit of 170 millions in the Budget. The financiers of France and the United States had been studying the May Report, and its revelations of the terrible state of British finance had so alarmed them for the safety for their deposits in London that they were withdrawing their money precipitately. There was a constant and increasing stream of gold from the Bank of England to Paris and New York. Mr. Montagu Norman and the other bankers were in a panic. Soon there would be no money left to pay the unemployment benefit.

As time went on, he gave other versions to other hearers. A second version was given to the Cabinet itself. It was a little more restrained than the one that he had told to the sub-committee, but with the same intention of stirring in their minds the response—a feeling of misgiving and of apprehension. By the time he gave his third, the Junior Ministers' version, he had become Prime Minister of the 'National' Government. His jaunty demeanour reflected the satisfaction that his success had brought him. He was more unrestrained and outspoken than he had been before; he mentioned names and made allegations that he would not have dared to make in public. His fourth version, the 'Authorized Version,' was given in his first broadcast as head of a 'National' Government. He made an earnest appeal to the folk by the fireside.

The fifth version, the 'Revised Version,' showed progressive change and amendment. Although speaking to the House of Commons, he knew that he was using a world-

## THE PRIME MINISTER'S TALE

encompassing sounding-board, and he made, therefore, a careful statement of explanation and excuse. The sixth version, the 'Vulgate,' was broadcast from Covent Garden Theatre, and in tone and substance was in keeping with its histrionic surroundings. The seventh, the 'Vernacular Version,' was heard only by the electors of Seaham, but it was the most characteristic and distinctive of all. He told the story then with one purpose only—that of creating terror. He frightened the poor working people so much by the tale of imminent disaster to themselves and to their country that they crowded to the polling booths in panic.

Through all these tales ran the streak of misrepresentation. The climax of calumny was reached when the mischievous falsehood was circulated that the Labour Government had pillaged the Post Office Savings Bank. As the audience changed from the Cabinet room to the constituents of Seaham, from No. 10 Downing Street to the hustings, so did the story change as to the incidence of blame. In the first version, MacDonald blamed, not his colleagues, but the bankers and France. As the days passed, the indictment against the Labour Government became loaded, until, at the end, it was blamed for everything—for the drain of gold, for unemployment, for the economic blizzard, and for the national peril. With that plentiful lack of humour which was one of MacDonald's most salient characteristics, he did not realize that his denunciation of the Labour Government's maladministration recoiled on himself as head of that Government. He was in the position of a captain who, having steered his ship towards the rocks, blames the crew for bad navigation.

At a later date, after the formation of the 'National' Government, a question by a young and talented Member who sat on the Liberal benches, Mr. Frank Owen, led to a most devastating exposure. It arose at question time in the Commons on 21 September 1931, and was a supplementary question. It often happens that, when the Government wishes to make an announcement to the House, a faithful follower is honoured by being given a private notice question to ask, and thus he attains a sort of reflected glory. The occasion was just after the mutiny at Invergordon. Mr. Holford Knight, a lawyer who had gone over to the 'National' Government, and had,

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in consequence, being obliged to quit the Labour Party, asked leave to put a question of which he had given private notice. He asked the Prime Minister whether he was now in a position to make a statement in regard to the classes of persons involved by economies whose cases were of peculiarly great hardship. As the question was put by special arrangement, the Prime Minister was ready. He had the answer, prepared by the Treasury officials, in his hand.

‘The Government have, as announced by me on Wednesday, been examining details of the proposed scheme of reductions. There are undoubtedly classes of persons who are unfairly affected, and the Government have, in view of all the circumstances, come to the conclusion that the simplest way of removing just grievances is to limit reductions, as regards teachers, police, and the three Defence Services, to not more than ten per cent.’

This answer brought an eloquent Welsh miner to his feet with a shrewd interrogation :

‘In the event,’ asked Mr. Aneurin Bevan, ‘of the unemployed taking the same steps to attract the attention of His Majesty’s Government as those which the Royal Navy took will the right hon. gentleman give the same consideration to the unemployed?’

As this awkward question was spontaneous and unexpected, the Prime Minister had no answer ready and was evidently intending to shirk it when Mr. Frank Owen, coming to the assistance of his friend Bevan, rose from the front bench below the gangway on the Government side and asked :

‘In view of the falling value of the pound and the fact that every other class singled out for a reduction has been granted a concession, will the Prime Minister now consider granting a concession to the unemployed?’

To understand the answer of the Prime Minister, regard must be had to the state of nervous exhaustion to which the keen cross-examination had reduced him. Suddenly this question comes from the Liberal benches. Had the question come from the Opposition, he might have been more on his guard.



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If he had been more alert, he would have remained silent. As it was, his answer was quoted against him on a hundred platforms in the months that followed. It was : 'The handling of the unemployment cuts was necessitated by special conditions of borrowing, and they must remain.'

This answer was in line with his speech on the day Parliament opened. The essence of his case was that the bankers had made conditions, and he was at pains to defend their caution. Indeed, he compared their action in making conditions before lending money to the consultations and questions which precede the floating of a limited liability company. He was at that point in his speech not so anxious to deny that conditions had been set down by the bankers as to excuse the Government's acceptance of them. He insisted that, if the conditions had not been accepted, this country would not have got the loan and 'then the crisis would have broken upon us.'

The answer had no sooner been given than the House realized that a blunder had been made. So also did the Prime Minister. In complete disregard of his earlier statement that there had been no dictation by the bankers, he was now admitting that a cut in unemployment benefit had not only been the special condition of the borrowing but that, if that condition had not been complied with, the loan could not have been obtained.

Into this muddle of prevarication came another question which made matters worse for the Prime Minister. Mr. James Marley, a young Labour Member representing a north London constituency, seized the chance to make MacDonald's dilemma worse. 'Does the Prime Minister,' he asked, 'now admit that the grants to the unemployed were cut down at the dictation of foreign bankers?' To have admitted this would have been to admit exactly what the Opposition had said—that the bankers had dictated. This must be denied at once, no matter what embarrassment the denial would subsequently cause. So the Prime Minister rose hastily and replied : 'I say most emphatically that that is not so.'

Obviously the matter could not be left in this equivocal position. Next day, therefore, Mr. J. J. McShane, an ex-schoolmaster and Labour Member for Walsall, asked the

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Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the recent credits given to Britain, any conditions, political or economic, were imposed. Now Snowden had no desire to get the Prime Minister out of the mess into which his prevarication had landed him. On the contrary, there was a gleam of malice in his eye when he answered firmly and emphatically: 'No, sir.' Then there uprose from a seat below the gangway Mr. W. J. Brown, a keen and clever controversialist, a thorn in the flesh of the late Labour Government. As Secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association, he was directly interested in the cuts, and he had been previously suspended from the House for persisting in questioning the Treasury Bench on the question after the Speaker had ruled his interrogation out of order. No sooner had Snowden taken his seat after repudiating the Prime Minister, than Brown, without waiting to be called by the Speaker, began: 'How does he square that answer with the statement made by the Prime Minister yesterday that a reduction of the cut in unemployment benefit was impossible because of the conditions of borrowing?' But the wily Chancellor had said all he was going to say, and he was not to be drawn.

As Snowden's answer had left the matter exactly in the muddle in which the Prime Minister had put it by his answer on 21 September, Major Milner, the Labour Member for Leeds, put a question on the Order Paper which he hoped would clear matters up. He asked the Prime Minister whether he would inquire from the lenders as to the possibility of a modification of the special conditions of borrowing which had necessitated cuts in unemployment benefit, with a view to the abandonment of such cuts. That question was put down for a Thursday, and this is the most important day of the week as far as the Prime Minister is concerned, for it is the day on which he as Leader of the House answers the official question put by the Leader of the Opposition as to the business for the following week. Milner's question was specifically addressed to the Prime Minister, and it was as awkward as it was important. MacDonald avoided answering it by staying away. Like the portrait of Cassius on a famous occasion, he was conspicuous by his absence. This meant that Mr. Baldwin had to deal with the embarrassing question. He carefully side-

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stepped : ' I am unable,' he said, ' to accept the implications contained in the hon. Member's question, to which the answer is in the negative.' Major Milner was not to be put off by this obvious evasion. ' Are we to understand,' he asked, ' that what the Prime Minister said on Monday last is not correct ? '

Then Mr. Baldwin gave an answer of the kind that has gained for him the reputation for innocent artfulness :

' I cannot answer for the contents of anyone's mind except my own. I would remind the hon. and gallant gentleman that two days ago, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked, in precise terms, whether any conditions, political or economic, had been imposed, and he answered : " No," which seems to me comprehensive and to which I can add nothing.'

By this irrelevant reply, spoken with an air of solicitous sincerity, Mr. Baldwin sought to draw the fire from MacDonald. Asked about what the Prime Minister had said, he referred to what the Chancellor of the Exchequer had said.

Day after day, Members had been seeking an answer to a definite question. They had been met with replies, from the three most responsible statesmen in the country, which were evasive, contradictory, or untrue. In the end, the impression left on the House of Commons was undoubtedly that they had witnessed in this affair a discreditable exhibition of contemptible prevarication.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

### *THE DOUBLE 'DOUBLE-CROSS'*

Why was it that the Prime Minister took care that the Cabinet should not meet the Liberal and Tory leaders? Surely, if the crisis were of such grave dimensions that Great Britain was crashing to disaster, representatives who could speak with full authority for their respective parties should have been invited to meet the Labour Cabinet or even the Cabinet sub-committee, to exchange views and suggestions. Surely, in the circumstances, this was the golden opportunity for a 'round-table' conference; indeed, a special conference of this kind was not only desirable but imperative. With both sides eagerly anxious to find a way out, the atmosphere of such a 'Council of State' would have been wholly friendly and the result definite and profitable.

But MacDonald was resolved against such a conference. The reason why he did not wish the two sides to meet is plain. If the Tory and Liberal leaders were invited to meet the Cabinet and to discuss the situation with them openly and freely, there was the possibility that agreement might be reached by concessions on one side or the other. Now, if the Labour Cabinet came to an agreement on an all-Party policy of drastic retrenchment, MacDonald's whole scheme would collapse like a house of cards. He realized that, if such agreement was reached, he could not avoid meeting the Parliamentary Labour Party for the purpose of getting its endorsement of the agreed policy. None knew better than MacDonald what would happen. He knew that they would never agree to such a policy, and he would be playing into the hands of those who for some months had been calling for his supersession. He could visualize the Party meeting, if he dared to sponsor this compromise. It would be like proposing disarmament at a meeting of the Navy League. A vote of 'no

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confidence' in him as leader would be moved, and, as he knew that he had personally, for months, been losing ground, it would certainly be carried. Whether or not this would split the Party, it would inevitably mean that he would have to resign the leadership, and the loss of the Premiership would follow automatically. The only way, therefore, to avoid the risk of agreement was to prevent the two sides meeting.

For MacDonald, the issue was too great; the stakes, for which he played, too high to permit the risk of failure. He was determined that there should be no mistake. Even although the two sides might be kept physically apart, it was not, however, impossible that some concurrence on the plane of ideas or acquiescence in policy might be reached between them. It had, therefore, to be his care that there might be fostered in the minds of each side a definite impression of the unaccommodating obstinacy of the other. There was only one way of doing this. He must persuade his Cabinet that the Liberal and Tory negotiators were determined that the crisis should not be dealt with except by a policy of economy to which no Labour Government could agree. To the Liberal and Conservative side he had to describe the intolerable attitude of the Labour Cabinet and their refusal to put forward proposals for the curtailment of expenditure which were either adequate or practicable.

MacDonald's position as intermediary in these negotiations was unique. He had special knowledge of the Labour position. He had been associated with one side for many years and knew several of them as well as they knew themselves—their foibles, humours, and ambitions. In these discussions on economy, this knowledge stood him in good stead. He knew to an inch the limit to which they could be driven, and he exploited his advantage to jockey the Labour Cabinet beyond it. The breaking strain was reached when the cut on unemployment benefit was demanded, and that result was not unexpected. As it developed, it was really a contest between MacDonald on the one side and his Cabinet on the other, and, in this, the Labour leaders were fighting with the sun in their eyes.

It might be asked why the ultimatum on the unemployment benefit had not been presented earlier. Why had

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MacDonald and Snowden assured the Labour leaders that no such cut was contemplated? Because to have done otherwise would have shown undue precipitation. 'Every avenue must be explored.' When it was found that there was a danger of the Labour Cabinet agreeing to the Liberal-Tory proposals, the demand to cut the dole was introduced.

As the negotiations developed, the Labour Cabinet put forward for the representatives of the other two parties certain tentative suggestions. They trusted to the good faith of their Prime Minister to convey these proposals to the other side. It was only when it was too late that the Labour Cabinet found out that they had been deceived. MacDonald had taken advantage of his position as go-between to misrepresent the position of each side to the other. There was absolutely no check at the time. The Liberal and Tory leaders had to accept MacDonald's version of the Labour position, and the Labour Cabinet had to rely on the story the Prime Minister told them as a true account of the demands of the Tory and Liberal leaders. Not only did he give a misleading impression of the general attitude of both, but, in particular instances, he was guilty not only of suppression but of perversion.

The most glaring instance of this was when MacDonald came to the Cabinet and declared that the Tory and Liberal leaders considered the £56,000,000 provisionally agreed upon as absolutely inadequate and demanded from £25,000,000 to £30,000,000 more, 'the bulk of which must come from the unemployed.' This, as was discovered later, was a tale that both Sir Herbert Samuel and Mr. Neville Chamberlain vehemently repudiated in the House of Commons.

Throughout the whole of the proceedings there was not a breath of suspicion as to the trustworthiness of MacDonald as a go-between. The Cabinet was obsessed with the gravity of the crisis and the need for immediate action. They were convinced that an emergency of extreme urgency had arisen, comparable only to the breathless moments before the Great War. They believed that France and the United States were making these demands. They believed that the necessary loans could not be got on any other terms. MacDonald had declared definitely that he was in direct communication with the American leaders and that they were inexorable in their

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conditions. They believed that the whole financial structure of the country was in imminent danger of collapse. The drain of gold was a tremendous bogey and frightened them thoroughly. They believed that the Prime Minister had a common purpose with them. They never dreamed that he was manœuvring to destroy the Labour Government. They never recognized him as an enemy. They believed that his position was like their own, but with fuller knowledge.

It was this faith in the honour of the Prime Minister that led the Labour Cabinet to go so far in accepting the economy proposals. They were prepared to balance the Budget and to acquiesce in every possible economy that was deemed necessary, but on the question of cuts in unemployment benefit they were adamant. But, no matter how far they went, their utmost concession would have been in vain, as the terms would inevitably have been raised to a height that they could not reach.

Of course, MacDonald's plan would ultimately be discovered, but not until the two sides met. They did not meet, however, until after the Labour Government had fallen and MacDonald had become head of the 'National' Government. The two sides then came face to face in the House of Commons and a series of remarkable scenes was witnessed. Again and again a Minister of the 'National' Government would make a definite charge against the Labour Cabinet on a particular question. This would be immediately contradicted by a Labour ex-Minister. The 'National' Minister would declare that he had been told the facts. Who told you? There was no answer, nor was one needed. On other occasions, a Labour ex-Minister would be giving his version. He, too, would be contradicted by the other side. 'That was not what we were led to believe.' 'Who told you otherwise?' Again there was no answer. At last one Labour Member asked the Speaker if, seeing that the Prime Minister was the only person who could clear up the muddle, he would demand that he be brought face to face with the contradicting witnesses. But the Speaker was powerless, by the Rules of the House, to compel the Prime Minister to face the music. This exposure was an unseemly and humiliating spectacle.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

### *THE ECONOMY DEBATE, 1931*

**T**he House of Commons met on 8 September 1931 for the first time after the new Government had taken office. It was the raising of the curtain on what was one of the most remarkable dramas in the history of the Mother of Parliaments. Never was the House more excited. When Parliament had adjourned in July, there had been some talk of an early recall, but that was because of the international situation. It was known that the financial position at home was not good, but Snowden's speech on the break-up of Parliament, a speech made with the full knowledge of the facts and with full authority while it was not optimistic, was certainly encouraging. No one could have believed that the great changes which had taken place in these few weeks were possible. The inner Lobby of the Commons was filled with the din of eager conversation. Members back from holidays were asking each other the one question: 'How has this come to pass?' There was one fact which stood out salient and that was that the people who knew least about the whole business were the Labour Members. The Lobby journalists laughed knowingly when this matter was referred to. A 'National' Government! Why, that had been known and talked of long before Parliament adjourned. Not only had J. H. Thomas, in a burst of hilarious expansiveness, boasted that he was to be included in the Cabinet of the 'National' Government that was to be formed in September, but other prospective Ministers had told of their good fortune.

Before Parliament rose, there had been a campaign against the wastefulness of the Labour Government. The ship of State was on the rocks. No two men had more power and authority in the navigation of the ship than MacDonald and Snowden. The navigation of the ship was entirely in their



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hands. The crew were able, willing, and obedient. Now that the unfortunate ship had been wrecked, the captain and the mate blamed the engineers and the stewards. The man most responsible for steering the Labour Government on to the rocks had been put in command of the new ship and acclaimed with loud hosannas as the great deliverer, who would redeem the country in the autumn from his follies and failures in the summer.

There were those who said : ' I told you so.' It was recalled that Thomas and Snowden had opposed MacDonald for the Chairmanship of the Party and that Snowden had always believed that MacDonald was an impostor. The incident in the 1917 Club in 1924, just after the Red Letter Election, was recalled when Trevelyan, face to face with MacDonald, had accused him of letting the Party down. If MacDonald's line of action was not foreseen, it ought to have been.

When Members now took their places, the Labour Party had moved to the Opposition side, and the Tories and Liberals with a few ' National ' Labour Members were crowding the Government's benches behind the Treasury Bench. The Labour Members sprang up and cheered enthusiastically when Henderson entered. The first act of MacDonald as Prime Minister was to move that a Conservative, Sir Denis Herbert, be appointed Chairman of Ways and Means and Deputy Speaker, in place of the Labour Chairman who had resigned after the formation of the ' National ' Government.

MacDonald had faced many ordeals in the House of Commons, but none perhaps so arduous as when he stood up to justify his action in destroying the Labour Government. It was evident as he proceeded that he was seeking more to ingratiate himself with his Conservative friends behind him than to appease the indignation of the Labour Members who sat, critical and unfriendly, on the Opposition benches.

The story that he told, listened to with close attention, Members leaning forward eagerly to hear, began by describing the situation as one that was a test of democratic government. To those who knew that the real issue on which the Labour Government fell was as to whether, in balancing the Budget, a due and equitable proportion of revenue should be raised by the taxation of the rich, this reference to democracy seemed

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to translate avarice into high-sounding sententious phrases. He went on to tell the story of the drain of gold and the loans made to meet it. He spoke of the Budget deficit and of the unfavourable balance of trade :

‘ There has been,’ he said, ‘ an unfortunate propaganda intended, no doubt primarily for home consumption, which has had a great influence on the mind of foreign investors. There has been the steady weekly publication of unemployment figures, including people not unemployed in the literal sense of the term, which has also added to the fears. Finally, the May Report, meant primarily for domestic guidance, became a great international document and used in the hands—I should not like to say of opponents, but certainly in the hands of a section who were not friends of this country—was a sort of last straw that broke the camel’s back.’

‘ There was another contributory cause,’ he continued. ‘ Banks and countries with greater Budget deficits than ours had become timorous as to the possible immediate demands upon them, and they withdrew into their own vaults deposits that had been placed here for security under these conditions. This great international banking centre found itself undefended from the demands that were being made upon it.’

MacDonald reached the climax of his argument when he came to describe the raising of the loan and the conditions demanded by the lenders. It was noticed that he was careful not to say in this speech that France and America were making these conditions. He was afraid to do so at the time, although he was compelled to do so later. What he said in this preliminary statement was :

‘ If this country was to get a loan, it had to do two things, and not one only. It had to balance its Budget, or take steps to secure a balanced Budget, and to put its unemployment finance on a sound financial basis.’

After referring to the efforts of the Labour Cabinet to find a scheme that would be accepted by the Tory and Liberal leaders and the bankers, he continued :

‘ When the Labour Cabinet’s scheme was put to the representatives of the other political parties, they said to us :

"Will this scheme secure the loan? If it does we will support it. If it does not, we shall not." Representatives of the Bank of England were consulted as to whether, in their opinion, the scheme produced would produce the loan. Remember, we were asking for it. If our terms did not give assurance, we should not get it."

There was no mention here of MacDonald's interrupting a Cabinet meeting to receive the answer to a telephone message which he solemnly alleged had been sent to New York. He did not mention the spectacle of the British Cabinet standing in the garden of Downing Street, anxiously waiting to see if this submissive appeal would persuade the American bankers to lend enough money to save Great Britain from bankruptcy.

The Budget is a House of Commons document, a political document. To demand that certain measures be taken by the House of Commons is surely a political demand. MacDonald had just said that the bankers had made the demand that one of the measures to balance the Budget must be a cut in unemployment benefit; then he proceeded to deny that they made any political demand:

"I wish to state, specifically and emphatically, and this has been reported to my colleagues before, that never in the whole process of the negotiations carried on by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and myself, with the approval of the Government, and reported to it immediately after each interview, did the banks interfere with political proposals. They simply confined themselves to giving us expert advice as to the effect of the proposals on the possible yield of the loan."

There was a laugh at this, as it was known that the heads of the great banks, headed by Mr. Montagu Norman, had drawn up a document, based on the Report of the May Committee, embodying their demands on the Government, and had personally presented it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Within the first hour of his return from Lossiemouth, MacDonald had this document placed before him. If it were true that the bankers did not make the demands, it must have been the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal Parties who presented the ultimatum to the Labour Cabinet.

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MacDonald then went on to tell of the disaster that would befall this country if she were driven off the gold standard.

'Sterling would have tumbled. One day it would have been 20 shillings, and the next 10 shillings, and it would have tumbled without control. That happened in Berlin. Hon. Members who are representing Labour, but not more adequately than I am and than I shall be doing, have to remember what would have happened if nothing had been done to avert what was maturing over our heads. I emphasize the point. If there is a real panic, the value of money may wither to nothing. War pensions, old age pensions, health and insurance benefits become worth, as they became in Germany, only the price of a newspaper.'

Mr. Henderson, Leader of the Opposition, in replying, assured the House that there were substantial points of difference in the statement that the Prime Minister had made and the statement that he himself proposed to make. Henderson then told the story as he knew it. When the position was placed before the Cabinet, there were two tasks that they had to take in hand. One was to find ways and means to balance the Budget, and, in the second place, they were told that they had to balance the Unemployment Fund on an estimate of 3,000,000 unemployed.

'While I thought it was right,' said Henderson, 'that we should try to balance the Budget, I did not see how at one step and at the same time we should be called upon to balance the Unemployment Fund.'

He then proceeded to point out what was the real difference between the two sides. He declared emphatically that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were beginning at the wrong end.

'Surely the right way to begin is not to go to those who have the least under the system of society under which we live, but to go to those who have most. That was the position that I took up, and I have never departed from it.'

Speaking with great emphasis, Henderson caught the attention of the House when he went on to raise a personal issue :

‘The next point to which I want to refer is a point of very great importance in the history of the proceedings. The Prime Minister did not refer to the fact that, on more than one occasion, I thought the position had become so serious that I wanted the members of the Party to be called together, in order that the situation might be reported to them. We have this remarkable position to-day that we have the Prime Minister at the head of another government, and that never once did he look into the faces of those who made it possible for him to be Prime Minister. I venture to say that that is absolutely without precedent in the whole history of Parliament.’

Turning towards Mr. Baldwin, he quoted a reference to the Labour Government which Mr. Baldwin had made in his constituency ‘If the Government are determined to make a great effort to restore financial equilibrium at home, they will then have the support of His Majesty’s Opposition.’ That the Labour Government were determined to make such an effort was shown by the fact that, after sitting for several days, provisionally 56 millions of economies had been accepted. Seated opposite to Henderson was Sir Herbert Samuel. This enormous total of economies revealed by the Leader of the Opposition came as a complete surprise to him. He jumped up and interjected : ‘By whom was this figure accepted? By the Cabinet?’ Henderson was astonished, but went on to explain.

‘I have already said that my own personal position was this : “Until I see the complete picture, I reserve my decision.” We had reached the stage when £56,000,000 of proposed economy cuts were provisionally accepted, and we went away on the understanding, at any rate as I understood it, on the Friday night—two days before our resignation—that we would face Parliament, and, as far as I was concerned, I was determined, in the meantime, to have put into operation a statement that was made during the discussions—namely, that it would be no use going on unless we carried our own people with us. We met next morning, and what was the position? We had a report given to us that the 56 millions of economy cuts were inadequate, and

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that there must be from £25,000,000 to £30,000,000 more, the bulk of which must come from the unemployed.'

As the Leader of the Opposition proceeded to inform the House of these sensational facts, the Prime Minister looked more and more uncomfortable and sought to throw Henderson off the scent by making an irrelevant interjection. The Leader of the Opposition stood firm, and said :

' I will be quite prepared to stand by the Cabinet minute, and I think I will be shown to be correct, that, prior to the night I am referring to——'

Sir Herbert Samuel could stand it no longer. If Henderson spoke the truth, then the Liberal and Tory leaders had been grossly deceived. He rose from his seat and exclaimed :

' I am sorry to interrupt, but I cannot allow that statement to obtain public currency. It is not the case that the leaders of either of the other Parties said that there must be £25,000,000 or £30,000,000 more cuts, the bulk of which must come from the unemployed, or anything like that.'

This was a direct challenge on a question of fact. Henderson replied :

' I do not know how the right hon. gentleman can say what was stated in the Cabinet. I do know this, and, Mr. Speaker, if it is necessary, I am prepared to be placed on oath. (Hon. Members : " Is it necessary ? ") Well, our statements are being challenged, and I am quite prepared to ask each one of my colleagues, and I will venture to say that there is not one but will whole-heartedly associate himself with the statement which I have just made.'

Henderson then went on to describe the effect that this new demand on the part of the Liberal and Tory leaders had upon him. As it showed clearly that no suggestion of the Labour Cabinet would be accepted by them, and as it would be useless putting forward any proposal that they would not support in the Commons, Henderson told MacDonald that it was quite impossible for them to carry on.

' Why did I take up that position ? Faced on that Saturday morning with a *demand*, because that is how it was put

to us, that there should be £25,000,000 more, the bulk of which was to come from the unemployed, I visualized myself being in this position. £25,000,000 or £30,000,000 the bulk of which was to come from the unemployed ! I do not mind saying that that, even in this crisis, was too much for me.'

Henderson then went on to refute the charge that the Trade Union Congress had dictated to the Labour Government. He showed that this was not so and emphasized the fact that the Chancellor of the Exchequer informed the Trade Union Congress and the National Executive of the Labour Party only the Thursday before the Labour Government resigned that cuts in unemployment benefit were not to be included in any economy proposals.

As to the loans from France and America, he believed that the good relations between those countries and ourselves, and the interdependence of international finance, would have prevented them from doing what it was alleged they had done.

Henderson summed up the position by saying :

'The point that broke the old Government was not that they were not willing to make an attempt to balance the Budget, but that they were unwilling to comply with the demand that was made to us, in the closing hours of the lifetime of the Government, by the leaders of the political parties—at any rate, reported to us as having been made. I say that, rather than comply with that, I would have preferred to go out of politics altogether.'

Right through the discussions in the sub-committee and in the Cabinet, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had turned down any suggestion of a temporary suspension of the Sinking Fund as impracticable. Now the 'National' Government had modified it to £32,500,000. Mr. William Graham, in his speech, showed that the sum thus saved would have made it easily possible to avoid both the attack on the rate of unemployment insurance benefit and on teachers' salaries. He said:

'It is my duty to make it perfectly clear to those who have so widely criticized us in recent weeks that that complete picture was never produced. There was no declaration of willingness to modify the Sinking Fund ; if it had been

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accepted, *the change of Government might never have taken place.* It will remain true that it was specifically put to us that, unless one item in particular—a ten per cent cut in unemployment benefit to yield a saving of £12,250,000—was included in the programme, it would not restore confidence, and we were told that no other item could be put in substitution. Let the House be under no misapprehension. It was because of an outside insistence upon that specific point, which we refused to accept, that the late Government broke.’

On the second reading of the National Economy Bill next day, another sensational incident occurred. The Prime Minister opened the discussion and, in the course of his speech, said :

‘ Our taxation scheme—I am only using round figures—produces £50,000,000. The taxation scheme that we started our work upon was £88,000,000, and, in order to get it, tea and sugar had both to be taxed. There was still a deficit on that.’

He got no further. A loud protest from the Front Opposition Bench caused him to pause. Not only was he professing to reveal what had taken place in the Cabinet, but he was telling the House something which is so confidential that even the Cabinet itself is not informed until just before the Chancellor makes his Budget speech.

The Prime Minister was stating that the Labour Cabinet or its sub-committee had proposed to put a tax on tea and sugar. It would certainly add to the discredit of the Labour Government if it were thought that such taxes, which fell directly on the working classes, were being proposed by the Labour Cabinet. Lansbury challenged the statement.

‘ Do I understand the Prime Minister to say that the Cabinet discussed a tax on tea and sugar ? ’

The Prime Minister was nonplussed. He hesitated :

‘ The question of £88,000,000 was discussed between those who were required to produce the details for the making of a



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scheme to fit into a practicable Budget proposal.' (Hon. Members : 'Sub-Committee.')

This only meant that these indirect taxes had been inquired into by the Treasury officials, as is, of course, their special duty.

The last revelation of the debate was perhaps the most extraordinary of all. It was made by Mr. Neville Chamberlain who declared emphatically :

' I think that I, as one who took part in those conversations am also entitled to give *my* version of what took place. There was no ultimatum. There was no demand for a specific increase in the economies. *There never was a demand for a specific cut in Unemployment benefit.*'

## CHAPTER FIFTH-THREE

### *INTERREGNUM*

MacDonald's task in forming a government was governed by two considerations. The Cabinet would have to be smaller than other cabinets, and the circumstances of the coup took from MacDonald the power of free choice. The Conservatives had given him the Premiership for a consideration ; now Mr. Baldwin demanded the delivery of the goods. He put into MacDonald's hands a very undesirable and awkward panel of Tory beneficiaries. Some of these had been denouncing MacDonald for years, and several, to whom he had now to give posts of honour and authority, had always treated him with scurrility and abuse. He had, however, no option ; needs must when Mr. Baldwin bargains. It was Hobson's Choice.

The representatives of the Liberal Party in the 'National' Government also presented some points of difficulty. MacDonald had always treated the Liberals with ingratitude. To them he owed his Premiership ; they had put him into Office, and he could not have remained there a day without their support. On the other hand, from a purely Party point of view, the setting up of a 'National' Government was a godsend to the Liberals. It put the Liberal Party once more on the political map. They were, therefore, anxious to enter the 'National' Government. They had everything to gain and nothing to lose ; at least, so it seemed at the moment.

Sir John Simon had to be carefully attended to. It might be that, if Sir Herbert Samuel did not come into the scheme, Simon might be the only representative of Liberalism in the team. True, he was little more than a Liberal in name, but it was the name that MacDonald wanted, in order to give the Government appearance of being a genuine alliance of the

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three Parties. MacDonald had, therefore, provided for him adequately. Sir Herbert Samuel might have proved troublesome. He, too, was a Liberal, but a Liberal of the Right. He is a Jew, clever, ambitious, self-confident, keen, and, above all, endowed like the Scot with a characteristic racial faculty—namely, the gift of negotiating an advantageous compromise.

It was essential to MacDonald's policy to have as many Liberals as possible to support the 'National' Government. As there were no bona fide representatives of the Labour Party supporting the Government, the representatives of the Liberal Party had to be particularly cherished, if the Government was to contain anything but Tories. This, as it turned out, was easily accomplished. MacDonald had in his hand a power that few men could resist—the power of patronage. A glance at the roll of Liberal Members of Parliament six months after the election will show how he used it. All who carried any weight in the Party or in the House were given an office or a title. Those Liberals who had 'utility value' were given posts; those with a 'nuisance value' were given honours. So it came to pass that those who could not join the Government, joined the gentry. There could be no privates in the Liberal Army; there was promotion for all. MacDonald, who had always refused any alliance with the Liberals, was now eagerly welcoming them to the Front Bench, and, for the first time in his career, he really regretted that they were so few.

The political odds and ends from the Labour side who followed MacDonald into the 'National' Government were, apart from Snowden, Thomas, and Lord Sankey, a handful of political nonentities. But they were of value to MacDonald. Like the Liberals, their presence gave a meagre excuse for the name National; but, unlike the Liberals, who after all could speak for their Party, these Labour 'Nationals' represented nobody but themselves. They were men who could not have obtained preferment otherwise. MacDonald saw how to use them, and, with the single exception of Mr. Lovat Fraser, he shackled them to his chariot by lavish patronage.

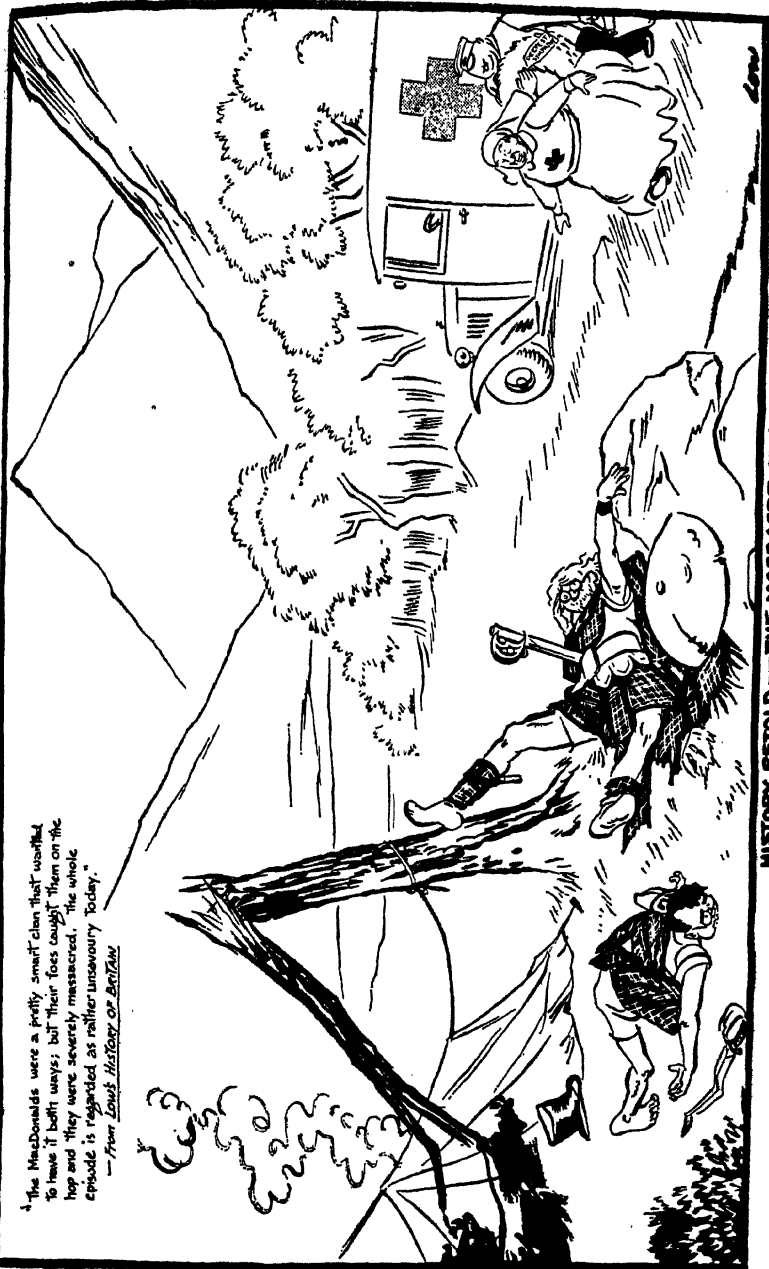
The case of Mr. Clifford Allen is typical and shows how far MacDonald was willing to go in search of help. Allen had been a consistent opponent of MacDonald for many years. In the New Year Honours list, 1932, a peerage was conferred on

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Mr. Clifford Allen. A note in *The Times* stated that he had been connected with the *Daily Citizen*, the *New Leader*, and the *Daily Herald*; that he had been twice imprisoned during the War as a conscientious objector; that he had been Chairman of the Independent Labour Party; a Labour delegate to Russia and a Member of the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International. It was certainly not for his past record that MacDonald delighted to honour this renegade extremist. *The Times* naïvely gave the real reason; in the previous October, Mr. Clifford Allen had written two letters to *The Times*, supporting MacDonald and the other sections of the National Government, and opposing the policy of the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress. So desperately anxious had Allen been to earn MacDonald's approval that he had a pamphlet printed and circulated at his own expense in which MacDonald's desertion of his Party was actually described as the work of a 'good Socialist.' After that, what could the Prime Minister do but hurry his unexpected supporter to the House of Lords.

There were several others outside Parliament who had been more or less lukewarm in their enthusiasm for Labour, for Socialism, or for MacDonald, and who now saw their chance and 'claimed kindred there and had their claims allowed.' MacDonald was keenly anxious to get as much help as possible and was only too eager to welcome them. For instance, Mr. J. T. Walton Newbold, the first Communist Member of Parliament, who had always been particularly offensive to MacDonald achieved a double somersault. First of all, he denounced the 'National' Government as a fraud. Then he saw that he had spoken out of his turn; when he discovered that MacDonald was likely to be successful, he swung round again and wrote a letter to Mr. Arthur Henderson, declaring that there was no other course open to him but publicly to take his stand with those old Socialists, MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas. It was a fitting consummation, not without the elements of farce, that Mr. J. H. Thomas, when he contested Derby in 1931, appointed this ex-Communist one of his agents. Finally, when Newbold discovered that MacDonald, with extraordinary ingratitude, was to allow his zeal to go unrewarded, he swung round once more and denounced the

4. The MacDonalds were a pretty smart clan that wanted to have it both ways; but their foes caught them on the hop and they were severely massacred. "The whole episode is regarded as rather unsavoury today."  
—From *Louis' History of Britain*



HISTORY RETOLD.—THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE.

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'National' Government as a blatant imposture. This is surely a record in political tergiversation.

The very first meeting of the Cabinet gave a foretaste of the dissensions that were to increase rapidly later. It was seen early that neither the Free Traders nor the Protectionists had shed their particular creed in joining the 'National' Government. The advocates of a tariff were particularly vocal and seemed determined that their policy should be put into effect. Even if the accommodating Sir Herbert Samuel had agreed to this, it would have been a betrayal of Free Trade principles, and the Liberal Party outside would inevitably have raised such an outcry as would make it very difficult for the Liberal leaders to remain in the Government.

There was, however, one point on which the majority of the Cabinet were agreed, and that was in their attitude towards MacDonald. Most of them regarded him with doubt and suspicion. On the occasion when MacDonald met the Junior Ministers, he had declared that he recognized clearly that the situation demanded a dictatorship, but one of a temporary character. If he had thought that he could wield autocratic power in the Cabinet, he had reckoned without his host, and the first meeting disillusioned him. He would have liked to have had men in the Cabinet who would be subservient to his authority, but he had no control over the Conservatives, and it was from them that trouble came in the first instance. Mr. Neville Chamberlain, keen Protectionist as he was, proved particularly troublesome. He knew what he wanted and would only acknowledge MacDonald's authority as far as it helped him to get it.

The position became more intolerable as time went on. MacDonald saw that there were elements in the Government and even in the Cabinet that would not hesitate to supersede him whenever it suited their purpose to do so. It would not suit their purpose to do anything until after the General Election, but he had come to believe that they were determined to drive him out at the first moment thereafter that opportunity offered. When MacDonald realized this, he became panic-stricken and set about planning to protect himself. If he were thrown out by the Tories, his whole scheme would collapse. There would then be nothing left but the Labour Party. Had

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he absolutely burnt his boats? Was there any chance of his being accepted, if and when his present allies threw him over?

Although I knew that there was trouble in the Cabinet—Mr. J. H. Thomas had been very denunciatory of Sir Herbert Samuel for causing it—yet it was with considerable surprise that, one day, I received a message at the House of Commons that Mr. H. B. Usher, MacDonald's Political Secretary, wanted to see me. I went to the Secretaries' room. While I waited for the arrival of Mr. Usher I had a few words with Mr. S. F. Markham, MacDonald's Parliamentary Secretary, who had been appointed after my resignation. He it was who gave me a clue as to why I was wanted. He, too, was much alarmed as to what was to happen to him. He was one of those who had gone over with MacDonald; now he was afraid that they would all crash together. He tried to sound me as to how the Labour Members would regard him if he came back. I felt that it would be more honest to be frank to the length of cruelty. "There will be no 'come-back' for you," I told him. "Surely," he pleaded, "you will not treat us worse than you did Henderson, Clynes, and the others after the War." "That was different," I answered. "Henderson and Clynes did not leave the Labour Party to join the Government, and moreover, their acceptance of office in the Coalition Government was endorsed by the Party." Then Mr. Usher arrived. I had not had any communication with MacDonald for about three weeks, and I was interested in his wish to see me. It was soon told. I was informed that MacDonald was very worried about the attitude of his old friends in the Labour Party. He was very distressed if this national emergency should result in permanent alienation. Would it be possible for me to arrange a friendly meeting of those who had been more or less associated with him personally, and who might be more favourably disposed towards him. He was most anxious that they should understand his position. I caught up the words 'favourably disposed' and asked him whom exactly MacDonald meant. "Oh, well," said Mr. Usher, "there's yourself and Bob Morrison, Mrs. Hamilton, and Willie Leach, and anyone else you can think of." "Has the Prime Minister anything new to tell us?" I asked. "No," he said, "but he

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would like a friendly talk so that he might explain his position."

I had not much hope of such a conference and said so. However, I asked those mentioned and some others. They saw through the manœuvre at once and refused to come. I went back and told Usher. This was the last attempt of MacDonald to make overtures to the Party that he had deserted.

As it turned out, a temporary truce was patched up in the Cabinet, and, with their triumph at the Election, the control of the policy of the Government passed completely into the hands of the Conservatives. What is significant of the whole episode is that it illustrates MacDonald's characteristic forebodings and his constant care to safeguard his position in any eventuality.



## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

### *THE PILGRIMAGE TO CANOSSA*

**I**n a time of National Crisis, when not only the welfare, but the life itself of the country was in grave jeopardy, it is amazing that the deliberations of the British Cabinet could be compared, by one who took part in them, to the fights of the Kilkenny cats. For MacDonald to find unity in that Cabinet of incompatibles was as difficult as to find equity in the famous Dublin Court. It was as difficult as 'the search of a blind man in a dark room for a black cat that's not there.' Day after day the search for a formula on which to go to the country grew keener as it grew more hopeless. If these acrimonious squabbles of His Majesty's Ministers were to continue and were to reach the ears of the people, the fact that there was no real unity among the leaders would be realized and the National Government's prospects at the election jeopardized.

Matters were, however, brought to a head by the intervention of Mr. Winston Churchill in a manner that was as startlingly original as it was characteristic. Although he was well qualified by ability, experience, energy, and resource to have been given a post in the 'National' Government, he had been left outside, and he was left out because Mr. Baldwin had the same objection to him as MacDonald had to Mr. Lloyd George. Churchill had long seen through the game. He did not trust MacDonald. For two years he had been playing Harlequin to MacDonald's Scaramouche and to Baldwin's Pantaloon. He had referred to MacDonald as 'the greatest exponent of the art of falling without hurting oneself.' He had characterized him as the 'perfect snob' and the 'boneless wonder.' In fact, he had treated MacDonald with contemptuous ridicule.

On this occasion, he saw clearly what was going on; he appreciated the critical national situation, but he had no faith

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in the leaders. He saw that they were busily exploiting the crisis to their own personal and Party ends. They were engaged in a 'squalid dog-fight.' 'It would be a shame,' he said, 'if the strains so dear to British hearts of "Land of Hope and Glory" should sink amid the caterwaul cries of Tory and Liberal recrimination.' He added: 'The nation has a right to expect the best services that its public men can give irrespective of personal and Party interests.' His appeal was for the leaders to rise to the height of circumstances. 'Our affairs must be lifted to a higher plane.' Then he launched his bombshell.

'I propose that the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, should forthwith get into his motor car in Downing Street, and pick up Mr. Baldwin in Brook Street, and that these two men should drive down to Churt, and there demand from Mr. Lloyd George his powerful aid and counsel in their common difficulties and anxieties. No old personal prejudices or rivalries, no false ceremony should stand in the way. No intermediaries are required; no secrecy or intrigue should be tolerated. He is ill, and they cannot summon him to Downing Street. Courtesy and chivalry reinforce the national obligation. Let them go together. Let them go now.'<sup>1</sup>

The *Mail* article caused a sensation. Churchill knew that he was putting the Prime Minister in a hole, and he had no compunction about putting Baldwin in the hole beside MacDonald. Doubtless the ridiculous spectacle of these two great friends, Tadpole and Taper, in the hole together appealed to his sardonic humour. If Lloyd George joined them, anything might happen. But he must have known that the whole scheme was impossible. He must have known that Baldwin would not go within a hundred miles of Lloyd George. Was this Churchill's way of pouring ridicule on the 'National' Government?

Mr. Lloyd George's support was essential evidence to prove the bona fides of the 'National' Government. If that evidence was not forthcoming, what verdict would be given? This was the most exasperating challenge that MacDonald had ever

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Mail*, 2 October 1931.

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received. It brought him up 'all standing.' What made matters worse was the fact that Churchill knew exactly what he was doing, and it was one of the cleverest things he had ever done. He had known about the proposed 'National' Government early in July. He had talked of it to Mr. Lloyd George. He had acquiesced in it, provided that the national interests were safeguarded and not exploited for personal advantages. His challenge was a test to the Prime Minister. Was he prepared to put the national interests before the personal? If so, he would be willing to accept the help of the only other statesman who had held the high office of Premier.

MacDonald was in a dilemma. He dared not refuse to go to Churt. Mr. Lloyd George had not been left out by accident. His illness was a misfortune to the country, but had its compensations to those who were staging the coup. To ask Mr. Lloyd George to join the 'National' Government was like asking Kubelik to join the village band. Lloyd George's ability, experience, and authority would be invaluable in the circumstances, but he would be absolutely impossible if MacDonald's personal aims and ambitions were to be achieved. The result of the visit would only emphasize their differences. But there was no escape. He felt that to go was a humiliation; not to go might lead to even greater humiliation. Moreover, an authority that he dared not disobey had backed Churchill's suggestion.

So on Monday, 5 October 1931, MacDonald set out on his penitential pilgrimage. It is a long way by car to Mr. Lloyd George's country house, and, except for an entourage of detectives which followed in a police car, MacDonald travelled alone. He had, therefore, plenty of time to indulge his habit of gloomy foreboding. He was bound to realize that the laugh was on him—and he had had bitter experience of Lloyd George's keen sense of humour.

The Prime Minister did not remain long with Mr. Lloyd George. Even the thirty minutes was twenty-nine minutes too long for him. It was a very embarrassing interview. Lloyd George is a charming host, but he has an uncanny insight that could read MacDonald like a book. MacDonald realized this, knew that the estimate was unfavourable, and hastened to escape the smiling scrutiny of his lifelong antagonist. The

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answer was a foregone conclusion. Lloyd George was not going to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for anyone, and certainly not for MacDonald. Lloyd George is an Arcadian in a double sense, and the Arcadians are said to have been very fond of chestnuts.

After this refusal of Lloyd George, confusion in the Cabinet became worse confounded. Then suddenly a miracle happened. It was as if *Œdipus* himself had appeared to the distracted Cabinet with a solution of their difficulty, which like all great things, was the very essence of simplicity. Why all this squabbling? Why seek to divide the skin before one has killed the bear. Persons may disagree, and violently, among themselves, but there is one thing on which they are all absolutely agreed. And that is that 'no doubt but ye are the people and wisdom shall die with you.' This the country must be made to realize. Programmes are bothersome, policies are awkward; principles are restrictive. The National Government must have none of them. The election must be fought on its ability to solve the depression. It shall be a vote of confidence, but a new phrase was added to the political vocabulary to describe it. The people were to be asked to give the 'National' Government 'a Doctor's Mandate.'

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

### *ELECTION STRATEGY*

**I**n framing his strategy for the 1931 election, MacDonald had the advantage of wide experience. He saw that the most successful way to win the election was to appeal to two things—fear and patriotism. Although the Cabinet had been searching for something that would do for MacDonald what the Red Letter of 1924 had done against him, the trump card was, in the end, found by one not in the Cabinet at all. It was Mr. Runciman, a Liberal, who hit upon the play that helped to win the trick. He it was who originated what was known as the Post Office Savings stunt. His statement was ‘that a substantial part of the assets of the Post Office Savings Bank had already been lent to the Insurance Fund,’ and he proceeded to hint that depositors in the Post Office Savings Bank were in danger of losing their money unless they voted for the ‘National’ Government. His long experience of office as head of various departments must have made him fully aware that the loans were in the normal way of procedure by which the Treasury borrows money out of the Consolidated Fund; the funds are actually advanced by the National Debt Commissioners, to whom the Treasury pays the interest. The entire responsibility for the purely book-keeping transaction by which the Commissioners lend Savings Bank funds to another Government Department rests with the Treasury, of which Snowden was the head. This was eagerly seized upon by MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas, who saw the tremendous effect that this sudden scare would have on the great army of people who had invested their savings in the Post Office Bank.

It is to the credit of the Liberal newspapers, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, the *Star*, etc., that they protested strongly against this dishonest attack on the good faith of

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the Labour Government. Their attitude to this question can best be expressed in the words of a newspaper that has a unique international reputation for its fearless honesty.

‘It is,’ wrote the *Manchester Guardian*, ‘a ridiculous and mischievous agitation which reflects only on its authors. That Mr. Snowden should have lent his aid to it quite baffles the reason. He is apparently so far bent on besmirching his former colleagues that he ignores the exceedingly grave reflections which the allegations, if they are correct, cast on his own fitness for high office. Only on the assumption that the British Government was incapable of meeting its obligations on the internal debt could it be argued, by any stretch, that default on Savings Bank deposits was possible. No one has seriously suggested that that point had been reached ; but, if it had been, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who ran away from his plain duty in framing his April Budget, would have been the chief culprit. It is an absurd hypothesis that the National Government alone has prevented the fall of the pound. It can only be concluded either that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister did not understand what Mr. Runciman said or that they felt that any stick was good enough to use in the election.’

It was really an adroit move. To the man in the street it was the last straw. These Socialists are actually looting the Post Office Savings. Every man with a hard-won nest-egg hurried to the poll to vote for the ‘National’ Government and to protect his savings. It shall be counted for righteousness to Mr. Winston Churchill, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Baldwin Government of 1924-29, that he exposed, in the Commons, the utter falsity of this charge against the Labour Government. But that exposure was after the election, when the mischievous canard had done its fell work.

There was one respect in which this election campaign was unique for MacDonald ; he had the support of the Conservatives. By his association with them, he was able to adopt a tactic that for years they had made their exclusive monopoly. This is what is vulgarly known as ‘working the patriotic racket.’ It consists in claiming for one particular Party that it alone is inspired by love of country, that it alone

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is moved by altruistic patriotism, and that all other Parties are partisan.

It has been the constant charge against the Labour Party that it is disloyal and seditious. MacDonald had often in previous years to protest against the Conservatives annexing the Union Jack as peculiarly their own—as, indeed, the Tory Party symbol. Now, for the first time in his life, he had the support of the Carlton Club and the Primrose League. This strange association was seen when, at MacDonald's election meetings, the Union Jack was conspicuously in evidence. At a great meeting at Derby, the platform was draped with the national flag, and the red, white, and blue banners were fluttering everywhere. The psychological reactions to this patriotic display cannot be overlooked.

One advantage MacDonald had was of incalculable importance. Owing to the peculiar circumstances of the election, he claimed that His Majesty the King was supporting him. He pointed out that it was at the bidding of the King that he had formed the 'National' Government. He told the story that the King had put his arm round his shoulders and asked him to help him. He told the miners' wives of Seaham that the burden that the King had laid upon him was very heavy, but he was willing to bear it for the good of the country. Here was the 'National' Government, set up by the authority of the King and continuing under his patronage, asking for a vote of confidence. How was it possible to keep out of this consideration what would be the duty of a loyal subject? Support the man who gave up everything to obey the King's command! Support the King's favourite and save the fatherland from disaster! So it was a case once more of 'Your King and Country need you.' Every vote against the 'National' Government was a vote against the King. The effect of this deliberate exploitation of loyal and patriotic sentiment can be imagined.

Another unique feature of this election campaign was the abandonment by MacDonald and Snowden of the time-honoured rule that Cabinet secrecy is inviolable. In Mr. Snowden's *Letter to National Labour Candidates*, he makes a general charge:

'The very men who have issued the Labour Party appeal

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against tariffs proposed and voted in the late Labour Cabinet for the immediate imposition of tariffs.'

Then MacDonald joined in and, at Tamworth, told how the question had been discussed in the Cabinet. Snowden then disclosed that the Cabinet had on two occasions discussed the question of revenue tariffs and fifteen Ministers voted in favour of a ten per cent tax on manufactured and semi-manufactured imports. Then the question of a duty on all imports, including food and raw materials, was put. Mr. Graham and four others voted for that, and fifteen voted against. Thus, during the campaign, both MacDonald and Snowden continued the revelations of Cabinet secrets that they had begun during the debate on the Economy Bill in the Commons.



## CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

### *SNOWDEN AND THE 1931 ELECTION*

No narrative of the election would be complete without a reference to the great part played by Lord Snowden. It might be said that the great victory of the 'National' Government was, in large measure, due to his tremendous intervention. His amazing malice, as expressed in his many speeches and writings at the time, was a revelation and a disillusionment. He was an example of that peculiar malignity of the apostate towards those whom he had deserted—a constant theme of the historian. Snowden attacked his former friends with such vitriolic mordacity that his indictment became the chief election weapon of the Conservative Press. He threw himself into the campaign by the side of MacDonald with an energy and enthusiasm remarkable to anyone who remembered their earlier relations.

In his broadcast speech, Snowden described the election programme of the Labour Party as 'fantastic and impracticable.' Referring to the proposal for the public control of the banking and credit system, he said :

'The banks and financial houses are to be placed under national ownership and control, which means, I suppose, that they are to be run by a joint committee of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress.'

This was surely the meanest misrepresentation, and no one knew better than Snowden that the statement was absurd and a travesty of the Labour Party's proposal. For it was Snowden who, at the Annual Conference at Birmingham, in October 1928, when Labour's real policy was approved, made a powerful speech in support of it. He was particularly enthusiastic

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on Labour's banking policy as set out in *Labour and the Nation*. Speaking with an impressive earnestness, he said :

' I believe in the suggestion made in this report that the Bank of England should be under the control of what we might call a public corporation set up by Parliament, and, mind you, Parliament laying down the general principles on which this corporation should work. I believe that we are going to get our Socialism very largely in that way—that is, through corporations owned by the public, but controlled, in the best interests of the public, by the best experts and business men whose brains and capacity can be commanded. I think that the constitution that is suggested in this report is quite on Socialist lines, and I think it would work admirably.'

Forgetting all this, he tried to scare people with the idea that their investments were 'being ordered by some board.' Now, in 1928, just after the Hatry scandal, Snowden had stressed the need for a wise direction of credit. Indeed, a Board of National Investment was advocated three months before, by such madcap Bolsheviks as Mr. McKenna and Mr. Tulloch.

During the election MacDonald declared that Snowden had seen the crisis coming, that he had warned the House of Commons and also his Party of the terrible danger. It remains a mystery why, if the Chancellor saw that disaster was imminent, he did not take any precautions in his April Budget. Why did he not safeguard the nation against the perils which he afterwards claimed to be so obvious.

The force of Snowden's sneering disparagement is discounted by the fact that this attitude was typical of him. At a time of far greater national peril, during the War, when Mr. Henderson and some others joined the Coalition, he assailed them with wild invective. He jeered at them as 'office seekers' and accused them of being ready for any 'dirty work' their Tory masters bid them do. How did it come about that Snowden, who was so much responsible for what he denounced should turn and rend those to whom, until six weeks before, he had been the chief and most trusted financial adviser? What made Philip Snowden become such

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a renegade? The reasons are unfortunately only too obvious. Snowden saw through MacDonald's game; indeed, he saw more. However much he knew that the *coup d'état* was a swindle, his foresight warned him that the intrigue was going to be successful.

While some Labour Members thought that the electors would realize what the 'National' Government really meant and vote for its overthrow, Snowden foretold the triumph of MacDonald's election strategy. If, then, MacDonald was going to win, Snowden determined that he would be on the winning side. He knew that there was no future for him in the Labour Party; the Liberal Party was dying, if not dead; and he had been a thorn in the flesh to the Tories. Much against his will, he must ally himself with MacDonald if he would save his political career from ending in futility and humiliating failure. He must make himself as useful to MacDonald as possible. There were several reasons why he should be anxious to show MacDonald how valiantly anti-Socialist he was, and that he stood side by side with him in his attack on Labour.

The lengths to which he was prepared to go can be seen in his tirades during the election. His extraordinary gift of invective was shown in a memorable and dramatic speech which he delivered in the Commons just before he left that assembly for the Gilded Chamber. It was the last occasion on which he particularly addressed the Labour Opposition. He spoke from the Treasury Bench, and his speech, for its concentrated animosity, was a rare example of a modern, political philippic. With flaming eyes, with sneering lips, with stabbing finger, he leant over the box, apparently wishing to be closer to his enemies, as he jeered in sibilant acerbity. A scene of violent tumult followed his bitter peroration. The Labour Members felt as if they had been stung by a scorpion and shouted in rage. His last words were:

'I have admired the way they have cheered to keep their spirits up, knowing that only a few weeks, possibly, remain before the place that knows them now will know them no more.'

Snowden was a true prophet; the Labour Party suffered one of the greatest defeats that any political Party ever received in this country.

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There was, however, another reason for Snowden's apostasy. It was known that he had set his heart on a peerage. Peerages, like other honours and titles, are in the gift of the Prime Minister. Now, the Labour Party, definitely Socialist and equalitarian in principle, is opposed to titles of all kinds. It was MacDonald, to the amazement of the Labour Party, who was responsible for foisting the recognition of titles and honours on the Party. Admittedly, there was the constitutional difficulty that there should be a certain number of Ministers in the House of Lords. It was only on this ground and from a sense of duty that men like Lord Passfield, Lord Arnold, Lord Ponsonby, Lord Snell, and other Labour peers consented to sit in the Upper House. They were not only willing, but determined, to abolish the House of Lords whenever it was constitutionally possible to do so. It was this temporary necessity, arising from the unprecedented exigencies of the moment that gave MacDonald his chance to appropriate the tremendous power of patronage and retain in his own hands what became afterwards a most cherished perquisite.

There was no chance of Snowden being ennobled by the Tories. They would sooner have banished him to Devil's Island. They detested him for his Cobdenism, his temperance, his land taxes, and, more than all, for the sneering cynicism that had so often scorched them in debate. It was, therefore, to MacDonald that he had to look. The fly in the ointment was that he had to be beholden to his lifelong foe for both his peerage and his post. The extravagance of his calumny was the measure of his fear that, after all, he might be cheated of his honorarium. The element of time, too, emerged. If he did not earn his reward then, he would never have another chance. He had to clutch the forelock of opportunity as the Ancient sped past.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

### *SNOWDEN LEAVES THE GOVERNMENT*

**T**he quarrel between MacDonald and Snowden has been compared with the historic rupture between Gladstone and Joseph Chamberlain in the 'eighties.' This is surely an exaggeration that greatly flatters the present-day disputants. Still there are points in common. In the MacDonald-Snowden, as in the Gladstone-Chamberlain, dispute, the antagonists were two famous politicians, much in the public eye, who had occupied high office. Gladstone and MacDonald had been more than once Prime Minister; Chamberlain and Snowden had held high office. All four were distinguished orators. Two in each case had for many years belonged to the same political party and, at the time of their dissension, were still professing allegiance to the same political faith. Finally, in 1931 as in 1886, the quarrel was between a Scotsman and an Englishman.

While no one at the present time, except Lloyd George, is comparable with Gladstone as an orator, Snowden may fairly bear comparison with Chamberlain. He had many of the personal characteristics of the Victorian statesman. They were alike masters of the art—useful in a politician—of contemptuous disparagement; each was unrivalled, in his day, in his powers of cynical and acidulated invective.

An amazing illustration of MacDonald's attitude towards Snowden was shown during the first session of the Seven Power Conference in July 1931. One of the most important speeches of the Conference was the speech of the British Chancellor of the Exchequer. Snowden was making that speech. Snowden, the Iron Chancellor, the hero of the Hague, the man who had stood firm and resolute against the hostile machinations of the most skilful diplomatists in the world, was again playing a great rôle. He fully recognized the nature of his task.

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Mr. Stimson had just made a forceful appeal for co-operation in support of Germany. Messrs. Stimson and Mellon sat over on Snowden's extreme right. It was towards them that the Chancellor turned, and he directly addressed the American representatives. The beautiful Locarno room was hushed. The atmosphere was tense. History was being made. Snowden knew what tremendous issues were at stake and spoke slowly as one who chooses his words with care and forethought. Mr. Stimson looking eager and anxious was leaning forward to listen. The incisive, slightly sibilant tones, rose and fell but the words were clearly audible. The British Chancellor had the reputation of being cold, unemotional, and sometimes cynical. Not so on this occasion. The issues were too important. His check, usually pale, was flushed, his eye bright with excitement, he leaned towards Stimson and spoke with animation and impressive emphasis. He associated himself wholeheartedly with what the American representative had said and only regretted that he had not the powers, authority, nor the freedom of action which Mr. Stimson possessed. He was anxious, intensely anxious, to go all the way with America, but he was prevented by the constitutional differences between the relationship of the Treasury to the Bank of England on the one hand, and that of the State department at Washington to the Federal Reserve Bank. But he assured the American representative that within the scope of the powers which the Government possessed he would do all he could to achieve the great purpose for which the Conference had been called. He then proceeded to explain the policy of his Government with special reference to the speeches of Dr. Brüning and Mr. Stimson.

Meanwhile MacDonald seemed to be watching Snowden with a rising impatience. In a room where all was still, he was fidgeting nervously. He seemed anxious to interrupt Snowden but in two minds about doing it publicly. Suddenly he came to a decision and right at the climax of Snowden's speech, he sent a message to Stimson to the effect that the Chancellor's statement was not to be taken as representing British policy.

It would have been thought that on second thoughts, after the excitement of a great occasion had subsided, MacDonald

## SNOWDEN LEAVES THE GOVERNMENT

would have repented his indiscreet action. On the contrary, he regretted nothing, indeed, he boasted of it. It might have had serious consequences but happily the American representative estimating rightly the true value of MacDonald's intervention, and completely ignoring it, renewed his efforts to bring about a settlement. As for Snowden, he never learned of MacDonald's intolerable interference.

Well equipped as both contestants were, there was no battle-royal between them, there was no combat at all. Snowden's first blow knocked MacDonald clean through the ropes, and he made no attempt to come back. Nothing that Snowden said could tempt MacDonald to strike back. When, later, he did retaliate, it was not at Philip Snowden himself that he struck.

The Cabinet formed in August 1931 was merely a skeleton and emergency one of only ten Members. After the General Election in October, a full Cabinet of twenty Members was appointed. Of both these Cabinets MacDonald was Prime Minister.

Snowden's reaction to the new situation must have been a feeling of a falling-off in status. He had been one of the big five in the Labour Cabinet—second to MacDonald, but before Henderson, Clynes, and Thomas. Now he had dropped in precedence well down the list. Indeed, as far as any real effective power was concerned, he and his Labour colleagues were not in the list at all. He discovered that the Tories, led by Baldwin—the iron hand in the velvet glove—had achieved an immediate and, indeed, an arrogant supremacy. But the change in the status and authority of MacDonald was the greatest of all. True he was still nominally Prime Minister and so presided at Cabinet meetings, but merely as the mouth-piece of Baldwin and without a vestige of authority.

Snowden had been aware that Baldwin and MacDonald were working in close collusion for many months. He himself had been working hand-in-glove with Mr. Neville Chamberlain, and he has since admitted, in his *Autobiography*, that the very grave and sensational speech that he, as Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, made, just before the crisis, had been framed in secret and friendly collaboration with Mr. Neville Chamberlain. It can be imagined with what surprise and indignation the Labour Party learned this, when it is

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remembered that they regarded Mr. Neville Chamberlain as their ablest and most implacable opponent.

The new situation came as a shock to Snowden. Gone was MacDonald's air of brow-beating authority, as he had known it in the Labour Cabinet. Baldwin, now ringmaster, whip in hand, made MacDonald prance around the flood-lit arena. The difference between MacDonald and Snowden was that MacDonald liked the prancing, the bright light, the pinchbeck regalia, the tinsel trappings. Snowden, on the other hand, chafed under Tory dictation, keenly resented it and waited, biding his time. The first blow at the 'National' Government was struck by Snowden.

Above all others, Snowden is acknowledged to have been the most ruthless fighter. By Baldwin he was recognized as the most effective propagandist in the 1931 election campaign. In his letter of resignation to MacDonald, Snowden pointed out how his trust had been again and again betrayed. He said that, when the 'National' Government was being formed, he accepted with grave misgivings MacDonald's offer of a post. It was only after MacDonald had given definite guarantees that he yielded. The points were affirmative and comprehensive. They set out the temporary duration of the new Government ; the emergency purpose of the Government ; the character of the General Election that was to follow ; no merging of political Parties ; no coupons and no other Party arrangements ; no Party legislation of a controversial character. On each of these points Snowden believed that he had been betrayed.

His disillusionment began with the breaking of the pledge that no Party legislation was to be introduced. Nothing could be more definitely 'Party' than Protection. That split the Cabinet in two, with Snowden and the Free Trade Liberals on one side and the Tories, MacDonald and Thomas and the 'National' Liberals on the other. There was no hope of coming to a decision ; both sides were irreconcilable ; but the trouble was postponed, very tactfully, until after the General Election, on the principle of first things first. If they were not returned to Parliament, it did not matter what policy they decided upon ; they could not carry it out. The method of cooking was only relevant after the hare had been caught.



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It then became more and more clear that the Government, despite its name, was really a Conservative administration, which proceeded deliberately to carry out Conservative policy, and the first and principal plank in that programme was Protection. Under various pretexts, it was introduced. The Free Traders revolted. It is significant that Snowden was the first rebel. Although he had been one of the most energetic and effective speakers in the election campaign, he had been carefully silent about his Free Trade principles. Although he would be the last to be deceived regarding the 'National' Government's intentions, he never warned the country of the Conservative section's openly declared policy of high Protection.

It will be recalled that the issue before the electors was simple and plausible. They were merely asked to give the 'National' Government a doctor's mandate, and, after the election, MacDonald, Baldwin, and Samuel would set up an inquiry to find out whether Socialism, Conservatism, or Liberalism was the specific remedy. In order to justify a longer tenure of office than would be necessary to deal with the merely temporary emergency issues, such as balancing the Budget, a wider issue—the Adverse Balance of Trade—was introduced. It was a game of 'thimblery,' with the adverse balance as the 'pea.' That there was a pea at all was stoutly denied by the most reputable economists. What was definitely promised and confirmed by Mr. Baldwin himself was that, before any action was taken on the question of tariffs, a full inquiry into every possible policy would be made.

When the election was safely over, the difficulty was met by having no inquiry at all. Indeed, the whole imposture was given away by Runciman, the Liberal and, at one time, Cobdenite, President of the Board of Trade. The first debate in the House, the debate on the Address, was just concluded when he, with the coolest effrontery, produced a complete Bill imposing tariffs, which he must have had up his sleeve long beforehand.

On 2 December 1931 Snowden wrote to MacDonald protesting against the way in which a full Protectionist policy, including taxes on practically every staple article of food, was being forced through. 'I cannot go on,' he wrote, 'sacrificing beliefs and principles, bit by bit, until there are

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none left.' MacDonald's reply was characteristic. Although he must have known that Snowden was aware of his agreement with the Cabinet's tariff policy, yet he declared that he, too, was perturbed at the way things were drifting. He suggested that those Ministers who were becoming disturbed should come as a deputation to see him and bring Runciman. Snowden's account of that meeting could not be improved upon. He wrote :

'We talked for half an hour. The Prime Minister, as usual, was discursive and incoherent, and, when we left the meeting, we asked each other what he had said and where he stood, but none of us could give the answers to these questions. The only clear impression we had gathered from the meeting was that we could not rely upon the Prime Minister to resist the policy of his Tory colleagues.'

During the debates in the autumn, Labour speakers had said that the purpose of the 'National' Government was to make the poor pay for the depression. How true that was is seen from the revelation of Snowden that, at Christmas, Runciman was actively pressing the Liberal Members of the Cabinet in favour of a general revenue tariff of ten per cent. This, he hoped, would raise a revenue which would enable a reduction of a shilling in the standard rate of income tax. The poor, already hard hit by cuts and taxes, would have to make this up by increased prices.

A Balance of Trade Committee, appointed just before Christmas, became the battle-ground of the Free Traders and the Protectionists. All day long on 21 January the Cabinet debated the Reports of the Committee without reaching agreement. MacDonald was ill at ease, as well he might be, for, if Snowden and the Liberals persisted, they would resign, and he feared that that would be the end of the 'National' Government. Of the two sides, he knew that the Protectionists would not budge an inch. Any concession must come from Snowden and the Liberals. Snowden, therefore, had to go.

Snowden has told that a private meeting was arranged to be held at his flat later that evening, to be attended by MacDonald and the four dissentients—Snowden, Samuel, Sinclair, and Maclean. The fact that MacDonald went to Snowden's

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house was the measure of his anxiety. Many times before had they been at variance, but never in so keen, so desperate, a crisis.

In the interval, since the meeting of the Cabinet, MacDonald had evidently been discussing the deadlock with his Tory colleagues and had suggested a way out. He gave direction to the discussion by calling attention to the difficulty of his own position. Then he prefaced his proposal with a declaration, as frank as it was definite, that, whether they resigned or not, he had made up his mind to carry on as Premier. He admitted, however, that their resignations would make his personal position both embarrassing and humiliating. Then he sprang a proposal upon them that was really a revolution in traditional Cabinet procedure. It was, to waive, for the time being, the rule of collective Cabinet responsibility by allowing the dissenting Ministers a free hand on the tariff proposals, so that they could speak and vote in public or in Parliament against them. This Agree-to-Differ proposal was one of the most ridiculous manoeuvres which the 'National' Government resorted to for the purpose of concealing their spurious unity. To save the life of the Cabinet, Ministers who regarded each other's policy as disastrous to the nation agreed to *both* sides of a proposition. The fiscal issue pervades economic, imperial, and international relations; it is a governing consideration at every point. To make it a single issue to preserve a non-existent unanimity, to agree to stay in and to call it 'To Agree-to-Differ' was a fraud on the nation.

Eagerly MacDonald pressed this Gilbertian proposal upon the meeting, but it was scouted as quite impracticable, and the five separated without reaching a decision. At the Cabinet meeting next day, strange things happened. The 'Agree-to-Differ' proposal was put forward again—not, however, by MacDonald. Another Minister fathered the scheme. Although he protested that he was speaking only for himself, it was plain to Snowden and the Liberals that the whole scheme had been secretly planned beforehand.

This suggested compromise put the Free Traders in a dilemma—acceptance or resignation. As they were assured that rejection would mean the break-up of the 'National' Government, and as, at that time, Snowden and the Liberals still

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thought it worth preserving, they capitulated. It is significant that MacDonald gave no support to Snowden in his fight to preserve Free Trade. It was not so much that he was a Protectionist, but that he was Premier of the 'National' Government, and the maintenance of that Government was the paramount issue.

The second count in Snowden's indictment of MacDonald had regard to the taxation of Land Values, the most important feature of Snowden's Labour Finance Bill of 1931. It was a measure that raised the most violent opposition of the Tories. Some of the bitterest controversies in political history have been on the Land Question. So it was on this occasion. MacDonald had no sympathy with Snowden on this question and, indeed, pursued a policy of sabotage against him. In the Lobbies of the House of Commons he secretly canvassed Labour Members against it.

'Many friends of mine,' he said, 'who are landlords will be most heavily hit by this tax and it may be they will have to discharge some of their gamekeepers and gardeners, if it becomes law.'

Snowden was keenly enthusiastic and persisted against all opposition, with the result that, after a rumpus with the Liberals, as acrimonious as it was surprising, the Bill passed the House of Commons. As the Speaker had previously certified it a Money Bill, the House of Lords were unable to amend or destroy it. It was natural that the 1931 Parliament, with its overwhelming majority of Tories, should seek to repeal the Taxes. They had a powerful spokesman in Mr. Neville Chamberlain, and Snowden had to give way to the extent of suspending the Land Valuation Clauses. The Land Taxes still remained on the Statute Book. The demand for their repeal was kept up with increasing determination by the Tories. At last, in 1934, long after Snowden had left the Cabinet, they were successful in the Finance Bill of 1934.

In a Press interview, Snowden made a strong comment on this further betrayal by MacDonald.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that this has been done at the instigation of the Prime Minister, who wants to give his Tory colleagues further proof of the thoroughness of his



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conversion to Toryism. According to the statements of the Tory Ministers at the time that the valuation was suspended, it would have been a humiliation for Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Thomas, and Lord Sankey if the Government repealed the valuation altogether. It will be interesting to hear whether what would have been a humiliation two years ago to these Ministers, is no longer a humiliation. The only honest explanation they can give will be that nothing the Tory Ministers can do to make the Prime Minister swallow his former principles can humiliate him still deeper.'

The last phase of this controversy is a letter sent by MacDonald in reply to a protest by the United Committée for the Taxation of Land Values against the repeal of the tax. In it MacDonald descends to what a Liberal Member in the House of Commons called 'nauseating hypocrisy.' His letter is as characteristic as it is astounding. MacDonald wrote :

'A government which was determined to "take drastic and energetic steps to put into operation the taxation of land values" would have to proceed to legislation, as the clauses that have been in suspense for years, largely owing to amendments which the Chancellor (Mr. Snowden) had unwillingly to accept both from Liberals and Conservatives, were not sufficiently full to enable a great deal to be done.'

In this sentence, in spite of its 'woolliness,' MacDonald would seem to object to the Land Value Taxes because they were not 'drastic and energetic' enough. This is an amazing statement, because the fact was that MacDonald was opposed to any Bill to tax land values. He thought this Bill far too drastic and had repeatedly appealed to Snowden to yield to the Tories, lest the Labour Government be brought down.

There can be no doubt that the repeal of this Tax was a manifest piece of class and partisan legislation. If MacDonald had insisted on its retention on the Statute Book, it would have been some indication that he was sincere, when, speaking of an earlier attempt of the Tory Ministers to run the Cabinet, he said : 'If there is going to be any partisan manœuvring, then I am not their man.'

Thus Free Trade and Taxation of Land Values went by the

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board. That MacDonald's supreme concern was not principle but the retention of office, is borne out by Snowden, who declares that, on the two sole occasions during his term of office in the 'National' Government when he saw MacDonald privately, the Prime Minister was completely complacent about his abandonment of political and economic principles, but solely concerned as to his security in the Premiership.

Lord Snowden took his seat in the House of Lords in November 1931. When he had, in the witty words of Mr. Winston Churchill, 'marketed what might be called the surrender value of his life policy in Socialism, on terms happily advantageous both to himself and to his country,' he turned and denounced the 'National' Government with characteristic invective.

'We joined the Government,' he declared, 'not to reverse the fiscal policy of the country, but to help in dealing with a very difficult situation. The action of the Government is a flagrant violation of the programme upon which the last election was fought. But when it became clear that the determination of the majority of the Cabinet was to take advantage of their majority in the House of Commons to establish a permanent system of Protection, then we thought that it was time to consider our relations to such a Government. We not only offered our resignations, but we were anxious to resign at the beginning of this year, and it was only on the pitiable appeals of our colleagues in the Government that we decided to remain under the conditions of the notorious agreement to differ. If I was in the habit of being as discourteous as the late Mr. Joseph Chamberlain used to be to his opponents, I should quote these words: "The Tories had lied on this question with a vigour and persistency and unanimity which have almost elevated mendacity to the rank of a virtue."'

The cleverest of men make mistakes. Lord Snowden thought that he was safe in the security of the gilded Chamber. He made a tactical blunder. His attack wounded MacDonald, and MacDonald retaliated. It happened that Viscountess Snowden had for some years been a Governor of the British Broadcasting Corporation. By her tastes and her talents,

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her culture and competence, she was an ideal person for the post. The appointment and dismissal of the Directors lie in the hands of the Prime Minister. Mr. Baldwin had appointed Mrs. Snowden. After Snowden's speech, Viscountess Snowden was retired.

In an interview in the *Evening Standard* she said :

' Please make it quite clear that I have not resigned from the B.B.C. Board of Governors. I have been retired. I have been " axed," if you like, and I do not know why. I have not had an explanation of any kind. It is very awkward for me. People are asking me, and I cannot tell them. At recent meetings of the Board, I thought we were getting on very well. I heard no hint and saw no sign that anything was amiss. I continued to remain friendly with all the members of the Government. I have no reason to assume that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald is actuated by any other than friendly feelings toward me. The fact remains that it is the Prime Minister who really authorizes appointments to the Board, and, I suppose, also the retirements. The whole affair is a bombshell to me. I wish I knew what it all meant.'

In the MacDonald-Snowden duel the last word lay with Snowden. In an extraordinary speech in the House of Lords, he spoke in sneering terms of the World Economic Conference and with extreme viciousness of the mental deterioration of the Prime Minister. After mentioning MacDonald's ' constitutional inability to make any clear and understandable statement on any question,' he alarmed his noble hearers by using these words :

' Well, I would suggest that the Cabinet should look into the case of the Prime Minister, not only in his own interests, but in the interests of the country ; for it is a positive danger to the country that its affairs should be in the hands of a man who every time he speaks exposes his ignorance or incapacity.'



## CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

### *THE 'NATIONAL' GOVERNMENT IN OFFICE*

In the previous pages, it has been set forth that the most significant single act of MacDonald's life was his great renunciation of August 1931. Of that act there are two directly contrary opinions. One is that it was an act of heroic self-sacrifice on the part of the Prime Minister. He had declared that the Government of which he was the head had brought the country to such a pass that a new Government must be set up at once, and that the finances of the country, of which Snowden had had absolute control, were in such a mess that a new policy was imperative. He declared, too, that it was with great sorrow and reluctance that he castigated his late colleagues. In fact, it hurt him more than it hurt them. The other opinion was that MacDonald had deliberately renounced principles which he had professed for a lifetime and that he had done so for the purpose of gaining and retaining power and political fame.

This act took place nearly seven years ago. It is, therefore, possible now, with the facts before us, to come to a conclusion as to which opinion is true. By their fruits ye shall know them. In the first place, the 'National' Government began with an explanation from MacDonald that it was to tide over a special emergency, that the nation was to regard it as but an expedient of short duration. Each party to the compact was to retain its individual character; and it was to go its own way again when once the emergency had passed. He maintained the necessity of preserving the Party system. He was still, he declared, a Labour man, and nobody could sever him from his allegiance to his Socialist principles.

The one point at issue in August 1931 was whether a balanced Budget was to be made by sacrifice from the rich or by sacrifice by the poor. MacDonald then made his choice.

'He decided,' says Professor Laski, 'to throw in his lot

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with the men who have always been the historic enemies of the working class of this country. To lead them to victory there was no expedient to which he did not stoop; to continue in power there is no abandonment of principle he has not been prepared to make. He tells us with emphasis that the present is no time for the resumption of the Party struggle. But every step he takes, every policy he approves, are simply the characteristic step and policy of a Tory Party flushed with a victory built upon calculated distortions, to which he has lent himself.'

Snowden was a full year in the Cabinet of the 'National' Government and so was in a position to keep a vigilant and critical eye on MacDonald. In that one year of office, with MacDonald presiding over the Cabinet of the 'National' Government, he confirmed the opinion of MacDonald that he had formed during the forty years that he had known him. He was not surprised that MacDonald should persist in claiming that a Government so composed was an all-Party Government, nor at the dishonesty of retaining the name 'National' by a Government so overwhelmingly Tory in character, policy, and programme. MacDonald had admitted this himself, and, when Snowden and the Liberals first threatened to leave the 'National' Government, he had appealed to them to remain, as their resignation would leave him 'not a Prime Minister, but the Chairman of a Tory Cabinet.'

Snowden tells us that never at any time during that year or after did MacDonald, either in the House of Commons or elsewhere, advocate any of the principles which would justify his retention of the name of 'Socialist.' Even in the secrecy and security of the Cabinet he never took the opportunity to propose anything that would show the reality or indicate the survival of his professed Socialist faith.

Writing of the enthusiasm and persistency with which the Tories insisted on having their own way and 'on mutilating or suspending every piece of Liberal or Radical legislation which they could mutilate or suspend, without any loss of prestige and votes,' Snowden says :

'During the year we were in the National Government together, I can remember no occasion on which he put

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up a forceful fight for his own side in the Coalition. He was always far too ready gracefully to yield his point of view or his policies to those of his amiable Conservative colleagues, whose approval beyond that of any other he so palpably coveted.'

What shocked Snowden was the evidence forced upon him that the 'National' Government was a shameful imposture. Facts, cumulative and conclusive, had forced him to the belief that, as far as MacDonald was concerned, the *coup d'état* of 1931 was an act of gross betrayal and that his formation of the 'National' Government was not, as claimed, an act of patriotic self-sacrifice, but was inspired by self-interest and snobbery to retain the office of Prime Minister and to exploit that position so that he might indulge his hankering for high society.

As to the first motive, Snowden in his *Autobiography* sums up his conclusions thus :

' Taking all these things together, I think, they give ground for the suspicion expressed by Mr. Henderson and other Labour Ministers that Mr. MacDonald had deliberately planned the scheme of a National Government, which would at the same time enable him to retain the position of Prime Minister and to associate with political colleagues with whom he was more in sympathy than he had ever been with his Labour colleagues.'

As to the second motive, Snowden has this illuminating reference :

' As I have already said, I do not think that MacDonald felt any regret that the break with his Labour colleagues had come to pass, and later developments have amply confirmed this belief. The day after the National Government was formed he came into my room at Downing Street in very high spirits. I remarked to him that he would now find himself very popular in strange quarters. He replied, gleefully rubbing his hands : " Yes, to-morrow every Duchess in London will be wanting to kiss me ! " '

Not since the Hungry Forties has such an attack been made

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on the standard of life of the working classes as during MacDonald's Premiership of the 'National' Government. Poverty increased. From the time the 'National' Government took office the number of persons in receipt of poor relief in England and Wales went up by thirty per cent ; for Scotland, by ninety-three per cent ; and the combined figures for Great Britain, by forty per cent. The attack began with the cut in unemployment benefit in 1931. The sum of £6,000,000 annually was saved by the ten-per-cent cut in unemployment benefit, and, according to a statement made by Mr. Oliver Stanley, at that time Minister of Labour, the annual saving due to the Means Test was £15,000,000. In four years, 1931-35, the total reduction in payments to the unemployed amounted to nearly £80,000,000. What a tale of misery and privation lies behind these figures !

While MacDonald was Premier, the 'National' Government retarded the building of houses for the working classes at reasonable rents, curtailed schemes of public works, discouraged the development of the social services, and imposed new burdens on the people by increasing taxes on food and other necessities. It deliberately increased prices by its mad policy of restricting supplies. On the other hand, it gave millions of pounds to industry after industry, without in any way improving the lot of the workers in these industries.

One of the most remarkable features of MacDonald's character was his attitude towards the poor. At a time when Members of all Parties in the House of Commons and the Archbishop of Canterbury in the House of Lords were pleading with him to raise the allowance for the child of an unemployed man from two shillings to three shillings, when everyone with any decency and humanity was deploring the terrible privations of the children, MacDonald was ready to spend £100,000 of public money for the purchase of the Codex Sinaiticus and sought to justify that flagrant extravagance in a speech remarkable alike for its callousness and its snobbery.

'I believe,' he said, 'that it would be one of the greatest misfortunes of this generation if it could have been said of them that, when they were hard up, when the lean kine were browsing in the fields, the Government of the day had not made those purchases of holy treasures for which, I

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believe, their children and their children's children would bless them.'

MacDonald's record on Disarmament is one long story of lack of courage and a failure to give a lead or even to accept practical proposals submitted by other Governments. The 'Hoover Plan' for an all-round reduction of armaments was cold-shouldered by the Government and ignored. The proposal for the abolition of bombing from the air, put forward in 1932, and supported by France and other countries, was wrecked by the 'National' Government's insistence on the reservation that bombing should be allowed for alleged 'police' purposes in certain parts of the Empire. The 'National' Government, therefore, has a big share of responsibility for the failure of the Disarmament Conference.

MacDonald's work at Lausanne, loudly acclaimed at the time, turned out to be a complete failure, and left nothing but distrust and bitterness behind. The achievement at the Lausanne Conference was a negative one. On the face of it, Germany undertook to make one final payment of £150,000,000 in the form of bonds carrying interest at five per cent. This was accompanied by a so-called gentleman's agreement of the creditor countries, by which they would not ratify the Convention unless and until they secured a satisfactory settlement of their own debts to the United States. This ingenious device resembled that variety of hocus pocus known to the law as 'ringing the changes.'

His next foreign pilgrimage was to Geneva, where he brought a British Draft Disarmament Convention. This was a strange document. It contained the provision by which the Great Powers were given a veto power over even the summoning of the League. Japan was mentioned by name in this instrument, although she had just been condemned by the League as an aggressor.

Following this was the tour of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, two harlequins journeying to Italy, the home of pantomime. The comparison is justified by the tragic-comic farce they played there. Italy is also the country of Machiavelli, and the artful Mussolini made the British diplomatists look ridiculous. He laughed their proposals

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contemptuously out of the discussion, but contrived to put over upon the two Innocents Abroad his own Four Power Pact proposal.

MacDonald's first shock had come when he found how few were the numbers who had followed him from the Labour Party. It was here that he made his first miscalculation. As he thought that he could pick and choose among the Junior Ministers for his Administration, so he had been sure that he would have a goodly number of Labour Members to join him, and a great following among the rank and file in the country. He was wrong in every particular. A miserable dozen of the Parliamentary Labour Party had deserted to his side, welcomed for what economists call their 'scarcity value.' A miserable dozen, and he had reckoned on a hundred !

If MacDonald was disappointed with his following in Parliament, he was doubly so with his support in the country. The Labour Movement stood firm as a rock. In spite of every temptation, not one in a thousand deserted. The fact that 6,638,171 remained true to their Labour allegiance was not only an extraordinary testimony to their loyalty, but was a great blow to MacDonald. He realized then that he had burnt his boats ; he had passed the Rubicon. There was no going back. He knew exactly what those sitting opposite him were thinking of him. He knew that they regarded him as a traitor—and he had known some of them for twenty years.

It is one of the most cherished traditions of political life that a Premier shall stand behind his Ministers. How little MacDonald had of this loyalty was seen in the early days of 1934. It was then what has been referred to in the Press as an intrigue on the part of MacDonald against Sir John Simon took place. After Snowden, no one served MacDonald better during the critical period of 1931 than Sir John Simon. There is no doubt that the allegiance and support of a politician of his distinction were invaluable, and the fact that Sir John Simon joined the Government gave some excuse for the comprehensive name 'National.' From the first moment that Sir John Simon took over the Foreign Office in November 1931, he found himself being constantly set on one side by MacDonald, who seized every opportunity for playing the star rôle on the world stage. For two years he submitted to Mac-

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Donald's interference, but at last protested. No one would say that Sir John Simon's tenure of office has been successful. It has been marked by several spectacular blunders, which have stirred up the antagonism not only of the Labour Opposition, but of a large number of influential Conservatives. But it is only fair to the Foreign Secretary to say that he was carrying out the policy of the Government. This was a time for MacDonald to stand by his Minister. Instead, he joined in a campaign against him in the hope of removing him from his post. It is said of the MacDonalds that they never forget a friend nor forgive an enemy. Ramsay MacDonald forgave neither. Away back in 1924 Sir John Simon humiliated MacDonald in the eyes of the House of Commons, and ten years later the wound still rankled.

The prospect before MacDonald at the beginning of 1934 was black indeed, because of the growing opposition to him in the House of Commons and in the country. He knew that the only course open to him was to ingratiate himself with the Conservatives who had been returned in such numbers. He dared not join the Conservative Party, as that would have done away with the last shred of pretence of a 'National' Government. His 'National' Labour Party had been a fiasco. He could not make every member a peer, a baronet, or a knight, and there seemed no other way of getting recruits. He was, therefore, driven, as a last resort, to seek help from the other two Parties. Why not join all three organizations together for mutual safety? The 'National' Labour Party would be prepared to sink their identity for the benefit of all. The midge would enthusiastically assist the elephant. So this project of a coalition of all three Parties was launched at a luncheon party given to the Prime Minister, Sir John Simon, and Mr. Baldwin by the 'National' Labour Committee, in London, in November 1933.

MacDonald declared at that luncheon :

' I think we can quite seriously say that the three of us who are your guests this afternoon have formed a combination, forced almost against our will, by the force of circumstances, which we believe was necessary and which I know no one of us is going to lift a little finger to break up as long

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as there is national need for its continuance. The National Government has not sent out enough propaganda about itself. A National Government requires a national propaganda. The condition of the world now means that any attempt to return to Party Government is not only a mistake ; it is a crime.'

Only a person utterly devoid of a sense of humour, a person blind to any estimate of values, could have devised such a preposterous scheme. Everybody knew the reason for MacDonald's S O S for help. Everybody joined in the ridicule of it.



## CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

### *MACDONALD'S PREMIERSHIP ENDS*

At the beginning of 1935 Mr. MacDonald was Premier, Mr. Baldwin Lord President of the Council, and Sir John Simon Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. By the end of the year all three had changed their positions ; Baldwin was Premier, MacDonald Lord President of the Council, and Simon Secretary of State for Home Affairs. How this remarkable metamorphosis happened is a serio-comic tale of political intrigue and manoeuvre.

These changes were the first moves in the strategy of the General Election and arose out of the political situation at that time and had relation to the strength of the different Parties and the position of their leaders, with regard to Parliament and to each other.

MacDonald's Party was a little communion of twelve disciples. They were loyal to him, since splitting the atom is difficult, and faithful, on the principle that unity, even of a baker's dozen, conserves what strength there is. Sir John Simon's high-plumed cortege numbered no more than the bandit band that bothered Ali Baba. These 'National' Liberals were artificially reared, spoon (silver-spoon) fed, political hermaphrodites, beneficiaries of their leader, and, as Liberals, the best that bounty could buy—like the Chicago police.

Baldwin commanded the big battalion. At the beginning of 1935 he had 459 true-blue Conservative supporters in the Commons. Of the MacDonald-Baldwin-Simon triumvirate, however, he had less harmony and unquestioning loyalty than either of the other leaders. There was a constant and increasing number of carping critics and mutinous malcontents on the Government benches. At that particular time, the Conservative Leader was having one of those spells of detraction that seemed to have a definite periodicity. These sporadic

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outbursts of the Baldwin-Must-Go fever arose from various causes—political, personal, and psychological. Of those who, in their antagonism, took the high ground of policy, the Adullamites were the Dichards, led by Sir Henry Page Croft (prodding Baldwin forward on Protection); the Imperialists, the Churchill circle (most pugnacious of all); the Isolationists, supported by Beaverbrook; the National Planners; the Disraelian Democrats; the Tory Pacifists; and other odds and ends of cliques and coteries. Never at any time had Baldwin the complete confidence of his Party. This was due to their adverse reactions to his character and personality. He has made many spectacular blunders in the past and survived, but there was always the fear that he would make another.

There were those who complained of his general demeanour, of his seeming failure to recognize the urgency of matters of vital importance. They had a feeling of apprehension lest the easy air of benign complacency which he affects indicated a certain torpidity of mind and infirmity of purpose, both highly dangerous with a General Election in the offing. A Swedenborgian mystic cannot, these days, be a good Party politician. Their fears were quite unwarranted. Baldwin's air of Jovian placidity is the merest pretence, a useful camouflage. It is profitable and has proved a winning card in several elections. Moreover, who can now teach this shrewdest and most experienced leader anything in election tactics. Once the campaign actually begins, Baldwin divests himself of his lethargy as of a garment and becomes as busy as a billposter on a windy day.

There were those of the grouseurs whose grievances were on more personal grounds. They were offended by the harshness with which he discards an unpopular Minister, the callousness with which he 'fires' a failure. The back benches of the Commons are sprinkled with cashiered exiles, disgruntled deportees from the Treasury Bench.

Baldwin had acquired the habit of lofty aloofness from the rank and file, characteristic of Premiers who, not being big enough to combine affability with dignity, dispense with the former. His room at the House of Commons was the holy of holies. He walked stockily through the Lobby, with cold eyes

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looking forward, ignoring everybody, recognizing nobody, freezing off buttonholers.

In spite of so much antagonism and backstairs intrigue, Baldwin held his place and authority because his strength lay in his popularity in the country, and, as long as he maintained that Antæan contact, he retained his supremacy. The people put their trust in him. They idealized him as a plain, blunt, simple-minded John Bull, eminently respectable, entirely trustworthy. They believed he was genuinely anxious for Peace and were convinced that he had abolished Party government in this country for a generation. They had taken him at his own valuation. They did not realize that his pose of simplicity, his pipe, and his pigs resemble the ringlets of Disraeli, the collars of Gladstone, the orchid of Chamberlain, and were but the stage-properties of the successful politician. He was the mascot of his Party. Surely the supreme test of confidence in a democratic country is a General Election, and the General Election of 1931 had been a personal triumph for Baldwin. MacDonald with him invented the election-winning 'National Government.'

Now, the question he had to answer was: whether the next election should be fought as a 'National' Government or whether the Coalition should be dissolved. There had been those, especially among the younger, less experienced Tories, with safe seats, who had been clamouring for a break with the 'National' Labour and 'National' Liberal Parties, the removal of MacDonald, and the setting up of a purely Tory administration with a Tory programme. Those juvenile optimists failed to see that, from the Conservative point of view, the 'National' Government had more than justified itself. A glance at the legislation passed during these four years abundantly shows the 'National' Government to be a most effective instrument of Conservative policy. Much more had been got by the 'National' road than would have been possible by the 'Primrose League' route. Indeed, no Tory Government would have dared to go so far and brought in so many purely Conservative measures as had actually been passed during the consulship of MacDonald and Baldwin.

On the other hand, it would be hopeless, at this time of day, to fight a General Election on a Tory programme. The

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last such election which was successful was in 1902. The new election strategy was to have no programme at all. It was the policy of the 'free hand' with the people voting for persons and not for policies. That could only be done by continuing the 'National' Government. Thus, it came to pass that Baldwin, the iconoclast, who destroyed the Lloyd George Coalition in 1922, became one of the creators of the MacDonald-Baldwin Coalition in 1931, and its preserver in 1935.

But while it was definitely agreed that MacDonald and Baldwin must work together, there was something else equally definite. That was that to engage in a critical General Election, while the highest office in the State was held by one so thoroughly discredited, was to court disaster. Baldwin daren't risk it.

Again there was something in the contention that with the overwhelming Tory majority in Parliament, the key positions of Premier and Foreign Secretary should be in Tory hands. Finally, there was something particularly distasteful to the average Conservative in having to pay homage, as his titular chief, to MacDonald; that is, to one who was in name, at least, a Socialist.

In the House of Commons MacDonald had never been a favourite, and Snowden has said that he was never a popular Prime Minister. The 'National' Government had not been three months in office when there were intrigues to remove him. A campaign of disparagement and detraction was waged against him. Lord Hailsham and Mr. Neville Chamberlain, in the years before the crisis, had been not only hostile, but contemptuous. They carried their animosity into the 'National' Government and into the Cabinet Room itself. Baldwin always resisted the vendetta against MacDonald, recognizing as he did the success of the Coalition policy, and the need for continuing it. Now that Snowden had gone, and Samuel with his Liberals, the surviving 'Quintuplets' in the Cabinet had to be delicately nursed.

As the years passed the protest against MacDonald had become more urgent and the demand for his supersession the more imperative. This was due, in the main, to the fact that the truth as to what had really happened in the MacDonald-

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Baldwin coup of 1931 was becoming more generally known. Not a little of the enlightenment was due to the slashing exposure of MacDonald in Viscount Snowden's brilliant *Autobiography*. Other books written since by those who had first-hand knowledge had given revealing side-lights of the shady but successful intrigue that set up the 'National' Government.

What finally forced Baldwin's hand, however, was the fact, impossible to ignore, that not only in the House of Commons but in the country, MacDonald had become most unpopular. The attitude of the working classes to MacDonald could not be seen at free public meetings, for he had ceased to address any such meetings. But at the cheaper cinemas where the commonalty congregate, the appearance of MacDonald on the screen, which used to be hailed with applause, came to be greeted with cat-calls and derisive laughter.

Mr. Ernest Hunter, a well-known London parliamentary journalist, who had known MacDonald for very many years, having been associated with him away back in the great days of the I.L.P., writes thus of MacDonald at this time :

' I shall watch with interest for the Premier's rare interventions. His recent speeches in the country have quite definitely lowered his political stature. If he attempts to repeat them in the House, may all the gods defend him !

' To travel through the country with Mr. MacDonald now is an eye-opener to one accustomed to seeing the wild thrill of popular enthusiasm with which he was greeted in other days. Then great crowds invaded the platforms and joined with railwaymen and passengers in cheering him on. Now he passes from place to place in gloomy silence.'

A few days after that statement appeared in the Press, MacDonald did speak in the House. He was put up to reply to a vote of censure on the 'National' Government for their treatment of the unemployed. This subject always stirred up deep feeling in the Opposition and particularly so when MacDonald took part. On this occasion his speech amazed the House. It was a long and confused rigmarole of incoherent irrelevancies, which left his hearers in all parts of the House quite unable to follow him. Very inadvisedly he introduced his well-known 'On-and-on-and-on and up-and-up-and-up'

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metaphor, only to be greeted with ironical shouts of 'Hear! Hear!' and loud laughter. As he came zigzagging towards his peroration, he was becoming more and more tangled up in a web of words.

He had been dealing with the Labour Party's suggestion of a scheme of public works for the alleviation of unemployment. He summarized his argument as follows :

'That is where the point comes in—three million people put to employment on work which is non-productive and unnecessary in itself and which has no market ; three million people living upon income created by the masses of their fellow-workers, and, that being so, every pound spent uneconomically may appear to a small number to be income, but, as a matter of fact, it is income derived from capital, and the moment you begin, like unjust stewards, to tell the people who are listening to what you say and drinking in the expectation that you are prepared to spend capital uneconomically upon them, you are deluding them, and they are far greater victims of your suggestions than they would be victims if every bit of criticism you made upon my two right hon. friends were true.'

Members gave up the task of trying to follow him and ceased even to listen. The murmur of conversation grew louder. Usually when a Member of Parliament, through nervousness or timidity, is making a mess of his speech and floundering helplessly, there is a peculiarly House-of-Commons fellow-feeling of sympathy goes out to the unhappy one. But there was nothing of that on this occasion. Far otherwise, Members were either coldly unsympathetic or contemptuously hostile. At last there came an interruption. MacDonald welcomed it as a 'punch-drunk' boxer welcomes the bell. He sank, dazed, into his seat as the Speaker dealt with the interruption. Baldwin, his worried second who sat beside him, whispered some words of urgent counsel in his ear. Words of warning they may have been ; that he should speedily make an end of speaking. At any rate, when the Speaker resumed his seat MacDonald rose again and began to read from his typescript. But the House was not listening, the din grew greater. Murmurs from the Government benches

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behind him became most insistent, and, at last, when the Speaker showed signs of rising again, MacDonald flopped down into his seat, and the House sighed in relief.

Damaging as such a scene would be to an ordinary Member, it would soon be forgotten, but in the case of a Prime Minister it is fatal. As no Government could afford to allow its leader to be everywhere an object of ridicule, MacDonald's position became quite impossible. The name of the leader of the Labour Party as Premier of a Tory Government had once been an asset. Now it was an increasing liability. Personally he had become an Old Man of the Sea on the shoulders of Sinbad Baldwin. The only question that remained was how to get rid of him and that decision lay with the Conservative leader. It is notorious that there is little of generosity or gratitude in politics, but had he been willing, Baldwin might have done much to break MacDonald's fall, at least, something to cushion the shock. Instead he appeared to watch his confederate's progressive discomfiture with characteristic indifference. Many a time he allowed his followers to launch attacks on MacDonald, which, had he wished, he could easily have stopped. Indeed, it more than once seemed evident that Baldwin was not unwilling that MacDonald should appear at a disadvantage. It might serve to keep him humble and help him to realize how dependent he was upon the personal support of the Conservative leader.

On Monday, 19 December 1932, the all-important question of unemployment was raised in the House by the Labour Opposition. There was bitter antagonism between MacDonald and the Opposition on this question. Believing that they had the remedy for unemployment; knowing, too, that MacDonald had preached that remedy a hundred times, they were bitterly resentful that since he joined the 'National' Government, he had not only renounced his beliefs, but denounced them.

This was a particularly awkward debate for MacDonald as his honour was to be impugned, for on the last occasion on which the question was raised, he gave definite pledges, which it was alleged he had not attempted to carry out. It would be something of an ordeal to have to face the attack of the Labour Members, as he had no defence to make or any

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excuse that he had not used before. He simply couldn't face it. His old enemy, Fear, his characteristic apprehensions, got the better of him and he turned tail and fled panic-stricken to Lossiemouth.

Mr. Lloyd George, regarding this flight of the Premier as, not only a contemptuous dereliction of duty, but as a slight upon the House of Commons, was not prepared to allow it to pass unchallenged. Rising from the Opposition Front Bench he denounced the deserter in terms of indignant scorn :

'If the Prime Minister,' he declared, 'was really ill, nobody could say a word, but I read what the Prime Minister broadcast and I think we are entitled to make a protest. If he was well enough to travel to Lossiemouth—a pretty long distance—to speak on unemployment, I think it was an insult to the House.

'It is a little more than that. It is proof that he has no sense of the great responsibility of his position in relation to the worst crisis this country has passed through in times of peace for many years.

' . . . I wonder how long the nation will stand it.'

The nation had to stand it for two and a half years longer, before the MacDonald-Must-Go agitation reached its climax.

Baldwin had been content to play second fiddle in the band, knowing that when the right time came he could shift the leader and take his place. The time for that displacement, however, must be chosen with the utmost care and forethought. That he was able to choose the most opportune date during the past twenty years, for the swopping of jobs between MacDonald and Baldwin, is a tribute to his political strategy.

In choosing the time, an important factor was the Royal Jubilee. As Prime Minister, MacDonald had been very much in the limelight during the rejoicings. He was wise to arrange for his resigning in June 1935 while he was still in the reflected glow, and could exploit the publicity of that extraordinary celebration. Yet in spite of the golden opportunities of the occasion, his voluntary resignation was, to those who knew him, absolutely out of the question.



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That, at any rate, was the opinion of Snowden, his associate for forty years, who says of MacDonald's resignation :

‘ This is the last act which those who knew him best would have expected him to do. The prevailing sentiment, expressed in rough and ready terms, has been for years past : “ He will never go until he is kicked out.” ’

‘ He went and he wasn't kicked out. It may be that he stepped out one jump ahead of the kick. How was he persuaded to go ? There are several reasons. He feared defeat and did not want to fall from too great a height. It had been brought home to him that he was being ignored and being pushed, day by day, farther into the background. His reception, from both sides of the House, when he intervened in debate, was significant. It was definitely unfriendly, often discourteous, and sometimes contemptuous. The hostility of the Opposition was to be expected, but the growing antipathy of his own side was serious and alarming. While the Opposition side objected to what he said, the Government side objected to the way he said it. One objected to his politics, the other to his platitudes, and both to his incomprehensibility. One reason for his treatment by the House was his habit of making speeches without adequate preparation. It was as much this increasing indolence and dereliction of duty as any deterioration of his mental powers, that made MacDonald's speeches in the House such ludicrous travesties.

None of these reasons, however, would have induced him to agree to his supersession by Baldwin. The reason above all was that MacDonald, fearing a worse fate might befall him, went while the going was good.

## CHAPTER SIXTY

### WORDS! WORDS! WORDS!

‘Uncurbed, unfettered, uncontrolled of speech,  
Unperiphrastic, bombastiloquent.’

—ARISTOPHANES, *The Frogs*.

The reference is to Æschylus.

‘A sophisticated rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity, and gifted with an egotistical imagination that can at all times command an interminable and inconsistent series of arguments to malign an opponent and glorify himself.’—DISRAELI.  
The reference is to Gladstone.

THE separate words that form the name Ramsay MacDonald have passed into the political vernacular of several countries. In France the word MacDonald is being used as a substantive and adjective, where in Britain the word ‘National’ is in use, with a new significance. A ‘National’ Government is an adroit, gerrymandering manoeuvre by which a Prime Minister, for personal reasons, offers posts in the Cabinet to the chiefs of the other Parties, to their mutual advantage.

Etymologically the word, applied to a Government, should signify that it is absolutely non-Party, and it is manifestly unfair to use it to signify a fake coalition. It was in this malicious sense that the word was used in France some time ago, when it was alleged that M. Blum,<sup>1</sup> the Socialist leader, was intending to set up a ‘MacDonald Government,’ to circumvent his political opponents, following the British example of 1931. In America, during the Presidential campaign of 1933, the word ‘Ramsay’ came into use again in a definitely sinister sense. When a politician is guilty of a

<sup>1</sup> M. Blum has replied to attacks on him from the Right by saying he would not ‘do a Macdonald’ on the workers and put the country into the hands of reactionaries under the specious plea of national unity.

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particularly dirty piece of treachery to his friends, he is said to have done a 'Ramsay' on them.

The name occurs once more, this time in a more innocuous connection, in the word 'MacDonaldism.' This word is applied to that droll mode of expression which became a feature of MacDonald's speeches, which is a characteristic woolliness, a confusion of thought, a lack of clearness and definition. In the House of Commons, on 9 December 1931, MacDonald uttered a typical MacDonaldism.

'Who is going to challenge,' he said, 'the fact, with reference to the sort of appeal that was made, in a most extraordinary way, by right hon. Members opposite, about the banking policy, in the middle of a crisis, that the election of this Government did give political confidence, did impress the world with the fact that, at any rate, the House of Commons—there might be a minority which would criticize, which might be uncertain in its form of criticism, but that, nevertheless, there was such a large majority that whoever dealt with Great Britain financially, economically or politically, dealt with something that was stable for, at any rate, four or five years? At any rate, that is a contribution to the stabilization of the currency.'

Earlier in the same debate, MacDonald, replying to an interjection by Sir Stafford Cripps, philosophized as follows: 'There is one kind of truth, and there is another kind of truth. They may both be true, but it all depends upon how they are meant to be used.' These typical MacDonaldisms show the deterioration in MacDonald's oratory that had been noticeably increasing from year to year. It was to this mental deterioration that Viscount Snowden referred, when, newly resigned from the 'National' Government and still smarting under what he considered a treacherous betrayal by MacDonald, he launched his memorable philippic. After a general attack on his politics, his principles, his behaviour, and his character, he spoke of MacDonald's constitutional inability to make any clear and understandable statement upon any question. The Greeks had a word for it. They called it perissology—the use of more words than necessary. With the Greeks, however, it was a minor fault, for their syntax and

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the structure of the Greek sentence kept the meaning clear in spite of redundancy. A Greek might be guilty of perissology and still be accounted an orator. Not so MacDonald; he becomes 'in wandering mazes lost' and carries redundancy beyond the limits of intelligibility. This is the more deplorable since perspicuity is the fundamental quality of style in oratory. Nothing can atone for the lack of it. Without clarity of statement, the richest ornaments of style only glimmer through the dark, never to please but always to puzzle, to irritate, to annoy the hearer.

MacDonald had a plentiful lack of perspicuity. Indeed, the consistent characteristics of his oratory were turgid obscurity and ambiguous verbosity. In the House of Commons, this was so well known that it had become a joke. Some time ago, while the London Passenger Transport Bill was being debated, Mr. Seymour, a nimble-witted Labour Member, noted for his sardonic satire, protested against the absence of anyone on the Treasury Bench who could clear up an obscure point that had arisen. Noting the absence of MacDonald, he set the House into a roar of laughter by remarking: 'What we want is a Cabinet Minister with a gift of lucid and clear exposition, and I suggest that we should send for the Prime Minister.'

Mr. Churchill's reference to this peculiarity of MacDonald's speeches is as apt as it is malicious: 'The Prime Minister has the gift of compressing the largest number of words into the smallest amount of thought.' This extraordinary trait is exemplified by MacDonald in the following: 'What we have to do is to pile up and pile up and pile up the income of the industry in this way and that way and the other way.' Again, in the House of Commons, speaking on Foreign affairs, MacDonald said:

'The time has gone by when, by a combination of any Powers, any European people can be kept down by obligations which it regards as being inconsistent with its self-respect and its honour, and we have now to make it perfectly clear that the obligations that are to be placed upon the nations of Europe are to be obligations of honour and moral responsibility—obligations which will be all the more serious for them, since they have taken them upon themselves in a voluntary way.'



LITTLE MEN, LITTLE MEN. MUST YOU BE TAUGHT ANOTHER LESSON ?

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As that did not seem too lucid, he made the matter crystal clear by adding :

‘Part of the responsibility of any Government which claims to be pursuing peace and making certain moral claims upon the consideration of nations is to make a contribution to the proper tranquillity of mind of those nations to enable them to do the right thing.’

It was in this speech that MacDonald did what is, for him, a very dangerous thing ; he risked a quotation. This was the well-known epigram : ‘Every treaty is holy ; no treaty is eternal.’ Now, he had not the remotest idea who said that ; so he introduced it with the words : ‘As a very notorious politician once said . . .’ *Hansard*, the Official Report, always admirable and attentive, records not only the thoughts of our statesmen, but sometimes their second thoughts. It put the saddle on the right horse by amending the phrase to : ‘As a very distinguished politician has said . . .’

Not only in the din and dust, the rough and tumble of the House of Commons, where the excitement might excuse a nervous prolixity, but in the calm and quiet of the *salons* of the literate, MacDonald indulges his fondness for windy wordiness. To the student of literary form, if not to the moral philosopher, the following single sentence, from a speech delivered at the anniversary dinner of the Royal Literary Fund, should be one of interest :

‘In these vulgar days, when everybody is trying to grab away the curtains that separate the sacredness of private life from the vulgar gaze of people who look about for entertaining incidents—from a sort of prurient knowledge of what they have no business to know, or to try to know—in these days, when what is most sacred to the man or woman who has been brought up in the principles and practice of self-respect is treated as nothing, those of you who feel the pain and shame of these days, and who come with bowed heads to tell your needs to the Administrators of the Royal Literary Fund, with almost no eye to see and no ear to hear, certainly with no memory to remember, can, having received aid, depart with the same sense of uninjured manhood as was yours when you entered into the original communication.’

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It was with great surprise that after the 'National' Government had been formed, and the names of the new Ministers announced, it was discovered that the administration did not contain the name of a woman. This was the more astonishing as MacDonald had always declared himself a believer in equality as between men and women. When he was Labour Prime Minister he was the first to place a woman in any British Government, and he actually raised one to Cabinet Rank. The Right Hon. Margaret Bondfield was appointed Minister of Labour with a seat in the Cabinet, and Miss Susan Lawrence became Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health. Even Mr. Baldwin, in his Conservative Government of 1924 to 1929, followed the good precedent set by MacDonald, and recognized the status of women by appointing the Duchess of Atholl to the important post of Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education, where her exceptional ability and wide experience might have full play. Now, a Government set up in a crisis which claimed to have representatives from all Parties, should surely have found a place for one woman in some department, where her particular knowledge and experience would have been useful. The real reason why no woman was included was that there were three Parties—'National' Labour, 'National' Liberal, and Conservative—all clamouring for posts in the Government, and there was no post left for the women.

The vivacious and outspoken Lady Astor, regarding this omission as a slight upon women, tackled MacDonald in the House of Commons. She asked the Prime Minister whether, considering that the women had done so well in the last election, he did not think it would strengthen the National Government if he had a woman on the Front Bench. The Prime Minister's answer was a priceless 'MacDonaldisim,' which absolutely flabbergasted Lady Astor.

'I should be very glad,' he said, 'not only to have one in the Administration, but half a dozen, and if my Noble Friend will find that there are not quite so many, or even perhaps worse than that, I, having made that statement to her and given her that assurance, am perfectly certain she will not blame me for the result.'

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In the course of a statement on Business, MacDonald set George Lansbury an impossible task when he said :

‘ Whatever the right hon. Gentleman may say in the country, I hope that, in the House of Commons, he will quote me accurately, both as regards my words and also what is in my mind.’

In February, 1933, there was a debate in the House of Commons on the eternal question of unemployment. Lloyd George made a slashing attack on the Government. He had accused the Government of complacency and expressed his impatience that something was not being done. MacDonald replied for the Government with an extraordinary redundancy, but brightened by a rich example of a mixed metaphor :

‘ He (Mr. Lloyd George) thinks that he is the only impatient man in this House to get things done. I will beat him fifty per cent any day he likes. Let us go ahead. Let us go on. In November, the change of Government came in America. No doubt he has a hawk-like desire for action, without bridle and without saddle, across the Atlantic.’

The time for responsible, authoritative speeches in the House of Commons is immediately after ‘ Questions.’ That hour has seen most of the great historic pronouncements. On the important occasions when the Opposition is moving a vote of censure on the Government, it is usual for the Prime Minister to reply immediately after the Leader of the Opposition has launched his indictment. At first, MacDonald was allowed to take this position of honour in the debate, but his speeches became so ineffective that he was relegated to the after-dinner period. The winding-up speech in a debate should have many and distinctive qualities, but it is not regarded as of the same vital importance as the introductory speech. It is made too late to be reported adequately in the morning papers and to receive the attention and treatment that the earlier speeches demand and usually obtain. The two winding-up speeches are in a class by themselves. They are delivered when the mellowing and soporific effects of a good dinner are becoming more apparent. The task of the Party champion is not so much to state the case formally—that has been done



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by others in the course of the evening—but to reply to points made in the debate, to gather up the threads of the argument, to answer questions, to counter-attack and, in fact, to wind up the debate. The occasion gives great scope to a clever debater to score, and the interest of his audience at this hour is more personal than political. He has a good house, Members having turned up, if for nothing else, to add one more division to their sessional record, and his audience is in a cheerful mood, interested and hoping to be entertained. If the speaker can brighten the proceedings by indulging his wit and powers of repartee at the expense of his opponents, so much the better. For this reason, the last hour of a big debate is often the brightest of the day, not only because of the importance of the occasion or of the repute of the combatants, but because of the way in which the discriminating speaker plays up to the mood of his audience.

Now MacDonald as Prime Minister was compelled to take part in a vote of censure debate. If he had not done so, especially when the question was unemployment, it would have been taken as a depreciation of the importance of the subject. But he was manifestly the worst possible spokesman for such an occasion. He was so long-winded and wearisome. Trotsky called him ‘a sober and timorous curmudgeon, in whom there is as much poetry as in a square inch of felting.’ The sentence which follows is from the last of three speeches on unemployment. When he had made the speech immediately preceding the one from which this quotation is taken, it had been said by the Pressmen, who are good judges of speeches, that it was absolutely impossible for him to make a worse speech than on that occasion. In this speech he achieved the impossible. Speaking of the unemployment policy of the Government, he said :

‘Schemes must be devised, policies must be devised, if it is humanly possible, to take that section (i.e. those unemployed who are unlikely shortly to be reabsorbed into industry) and to regard them not as wastrels, not as hopeless people, but as people for whom occupation must be provided somehow or other, and that occupation, although it may not be in the regular factory or in organized large-scale industrial groups, nevertheless will be quite as effective for themselves

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mentally, morally, spiritually, and physically than, perhaps, if they were included in this enormous mechanism of humanity which is not always producing the best result, and which, to a very large extent, fails in producing the good results that so many of us expect to see from a higher civilization based upon national wealth, which is the problem that has got to be faced.'

The falling-off in MacDonald's speeches developed to such an extent that he could not make a speech without becoming lost in a maze of words and meandering aimlessly in a labyrinth of digressions. A clue to the cause of this is the fact that it only began after MacDonald had turned his coat, left the Labour Party, and set up the 'National' Government. When a man has been preaching a gospel for forty years, he is apt to get into a rut, and forms the habit of repeating the same slogans and the old familiar formulae. He is bound to acquire in the course of many years a facility in a distinctive vocabulary and a fluency in a certain idiom of expression. When he renounces the faith of a lifetime and goes over to the opposite side, he has to learn a different language. He has to discard the old phylacteries and get acquainted with new liturgies. The psychological reactions to apostasy may be as real but are not so manifest as the physical. A man with a past is intimidated by the present and obsessed by the future. Public speaking becomes a terrible ordeal.

The difference between the Socialism of the Labour Party and the Toryism of the 'National' Government is fundamental. MacDonald's task, therefore, in making speeches defending Toryism and attacking the Labour Party was colossal. No wonder he made them badly. Principles and policies which he had passionately defended he had now to disparage and denounce. To ingratiate himself with his new friends he had to show himself a true Conservative. He had to out-Tory the Tories. This would be a formidable ordeal even to one with more adaptability and versatility than MacDonald.

It may be that the structure of MacDonald's sentences lends itself to the major fault of obscurity and ambiguity. When he was seeking to perfect himself in oratory, MacDonald

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modelled his style on that of Gladstone. That incomparable orator followed the structure of sentence known as the Latin 'period.' It consists of a complex sentence with a subject and several subordinate clauses attached to it. To practise this method effectively there must be complete familiarity with the grammatical form, experience of the rhetorical structure and, above all, a retentive memory. Gladstone, a classical scholar, all his life a diligent reader of Latin literature, and possessed with an amazing memory, could manipulate the difficult syntactic structure with ease and felicity.

MacDonald, unacquainted with the classics, unfamiliar with the technique of the 'period,' with an unreliable memory, piles with increasing irrelevance subordinate clause upon subordinate clause, loses sight entirely of the subject, and finally forgets to complete the predicate. Thus it happens that a sentence resembles those roads that, in the pioneer days, used to be built in Canada by ambitious optimists. They begin well, diminish as they proceed, dwindle down to a squirrel track, and finally run up a tree.

I have said that this deterioration in MacDonald's speeches showed itself most obviously since the Crisis. This can be clearly seen if two speeches, delivered on the same subject and at the same place, are compared. On 4 September 1924, speaking on Disarmament before the League of Nations Assembly at Geneva, as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary MacDonald said :

' Our interests for peace are far greater than our interests in creating a machinery of defence. A machinery of defence is easy to create ; but beware lest, in creating it, you destroy the chances of peace. What the League of Nations has to do is to advance the interests of peace. The world has to be habituated to our existence ; the world has to be habituated to our influence. We have to embody in the world confidence in the order and the rectitude of law, and then nations, with the League of Nations enjoying the authority, with the League of Nations looked up to not because its arm is great, but because its mind is calm and its nature is just, can pursue their destinies in the feeling of perfect security, none daring to make them afraid.'

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Ten years later at the same place, addressing the General Committee of the Disarmament Conference, MacDonald said :

‘ You are faced with the problem of what to do in respect to this question, to that question, and to the other question, but perfectly obviously, after you have faced the more superficial aspects of the separate questions, you want to know in relation to a complete plan what you are actually giving and what you are actually getting. Therefore, when the departmental, or compartmental, exploration has gone on to a certain extent, it cannot be finished until somebody, co-ordinating all your problems, sets out in one statement and declaration the complete scheme that this Conference can pass in order to give security, to give disarmament, to give hope for the future—until that scheme has been placed before you, you cannot complete your examination of compartmental problems and questions—’

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

### *MACDONALD AND PATRONAGE*

When, in 1924, MacDonald became Prime Minister, there was placed in his hands the most tremendous power that can come within the control of any citizen, with the exception of the King himself. Although the King is nominally the fountain of honour and although there is a funny little committee which is supposed to supervise the bestowal of honours, it is well known that the one voice that decides and dictates to whom honour shall be given is that of the Prime Minister. This was the power which he prized above all else—the great power of patronage.

Although MacDonald, in the eighteen years since he had entered Parliament, had learned something of the extent to which the Prime Minister can change a man's career and prospects, he had no idea, until he became Prime Minister himself, of its widespread ramifications. He found his relation to the great majority of his countrymen completely changed. He had been placed, as it were, upon a throne, and many were eager to pay homage to him for something that he alone could give—titles, honours, offices.

With regard to posts in the Government and most public offices, the power of the Prime Minister was supreme. By his control of the distribution of appointments, he was able to put a large number of men into positions, not only of authority, but often of affluence. Owing to the unquestionable authority of a Prime Minister, every Minister is dependent on him for his post. Appointed by the Prime Minister, he can be dismissed by him. In fact, he can hold his position only as long as it serves the Prime Minister's interest to retain him. How far the attitude of the individual Minister is subservient or otherwise largely depends on the character of the Minister. But MacDonald never for a moment allowed any Minister to forget this subordination. No Minister dare make an

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to the people, and appealed for support at the polls on its own particular platform. At that time the Conservative and the Liberal Parties fought their elections on a bona fide party ticket. The emergence of the Labour Party introduced a new alignment, as much if not more, economic as political. There was the Conservative-Protectionist-Imperialist on one side, the Labour-Socialist on the other, and the Liberal-Free-Trader hovering, like a disembodied spirit, somewhere between the two. After the War the Conservative leaders saw that a change had come over the political outlook of the people and it would be hopeless to appeal to the electorate with the old Party catchwords. The General Election of 1918 had been fought on a non-Party Platform, and in 1922 Bonar Law attempted to retain that non-partisan atmosphere by an electoral appeal which asked the people to vote, not for nostrums, but for 'Tranquillity.' It was not successful, and Baldwin made the attempt in 1923 to win by reverting to a purely Tory programme. He declared that he was being hampered in dealing with unemployment by the pledge given in 1922 by Bonar Law not to introduce Protection in that Parliament. He boldly asked for a mandate from the country for a Tariff Reform policy. This was the only time in more than thirty years that the Conservative Party went to the country on a bona fide Tory policy. The result was an electoral disaster. Mr. Baldwin learnt his lesson; for the Conservative Party, honesty was the worst policy. The experiment was not repeated. Never again would a Conservative Premier allow the people to vote on a major issue of Conservative policy. How well the warning had been heeded was shown in 1924 by the successful 'Red Letter,' 'Campbell Case' election. In 1929 the pendulum swung in favour of Labour when the Conservative leader first tried the famous 'Trust-Me' electoral slogan that made Baldwin one of the Beatitudes. Last, there was the 'Crisis' election of 1931—the most successful of all. These six elections, with the exception of 1923, were run on 'stunts.'

With the coming of the fourth year of office of the National Government, the question of the General Election became urgent. The team, the policy, and the time were subjects of the Premier's consideration. The removal of MacDonald from

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the Premiership and of Sir John Simon from the Foreign Secretaryship, and the reshuffling of minor Ministers, settled the question of the composition of the team that was to take the field. The platform and the date, questions not unrelated, remained to be determined.

The resignation of MacDonald had no effect on the determination of election policy, as for years before he had had no real authority. He had become merely a rubber-stamp endorsing automatically the decision of Baldwin, the real executive. Still, the decision of the Conservative leader had a peculiar significance to MacDonald, as he was to fight the most important and critical election of his life, under conditions of great difficulty.

Having regard to the peculiar nature of the combination that made up the 'National' Government, the determining of a policy for the election should have been for Mr. Baldwin a matter of much difficulty. Indeed, if the National Government had been a genuine combination of Tory, Liberal, and Labour Parties, wherein each representative held honestly and sincerely his own political policy and demanded that his particular Party panacea should be included in the programme, the task would have been impossible. But Baldwin's task was much simpler. He had only to consider the electorate. The subserviency of the 'National Liberal' and 'National Labour' Parties could be taken for granted. He had an absolutely free hand.

The problem then before Baldwin was the choosing of a 'stunt' for 1935. Now the easiest to devise and the most effective in result is the 'scare-stunt' attempted in the last three General Elections. In 1924 there was the Russian, the Communist scare, in 1929 there was a mild war scare and the electors were invited to vote for 'Safety-First.' In 1931 the middle class were scared with the threatened loss of their savings, the working class were alarmed at the prospect of hopeless unemployment and inevitable destitution. MacDonald's fearsome tale of the housewife's money losing its value in the shops and no longer able to buy food, was particularly alarming. The fear of hunger is historically the mother of revolution.

If a scare of this kind was to be worked up it must, to be

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effective, be something of grave import and serious urgency; something, too, that cuts across Party divisions. For this purpose there is nothing so useful as the scare of war. It is easiest to work up as it appeals to the primitive instinct of self-preservation, and so unites the nation against the foreign foe. On the other hand, it is a difficult strategy to oppose. It turns the tables on the pacifists who can be stigmatized as fanatical idealists who won't even defend themselves. The policy of the 'National' Government on armaments is the policy of the Conservative Party, which has not changed in fifty years. All the experience of the War, all the lessons of the post-War period have neither been realized nor appreciated. It is still the power-politics, the 'balance-of-power' policy of Victorian days. Baldwin, wholly traditional in his major assumptions, is in this a true Conservative. One cannot imagine Disraeli, the Dichard, the Patron-Saint of the Primrose League, Joseph Chamberlain, the Imperialist, or Salisbury, the Splendid-Isolationist, supporting the League of Nations or Collective Security. Although Baldwin has been compelled from time to time to give lip-service to them he never believed in the League or Collective Security. Only when his intuitive insight, characteristics, as it is uncanny, showed the danger of opposition has he made a show of acceptance. He has condemned Collective Security, supported it, disparaged it, or approved it, been for or against, as it suited the exigencies of the moment. Thus, speaking at Glasgow on 23 November 1934, when the General Election was a long way off, Baldwin said :

'It is curious that there is growing among the Labour Party support for what is called a collective peace system. Well, now, a collective peace system in my view is perfectly impracticable. It is hardly worth considering.'

He swung round again later and writing in the *Daily Telegraph* immediately before the election, he said :

'Peace is to be sought through a continuance of the firm support which has been given to the League of Nations and the principle of Collective Security.'

So a war-scare was worked up. The Government proceeded



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to accelerate the arms programme. There was issued the notorious White Paper initialled 'J. R. M.' by MacDonald, the pacifist, which definitely entered Britain in the arms race. This was followed up with a campaign of disparagement of the League of Nations.

But the Government went too far. There was an immediate reaction in the country against them. The deplorable attitude of acquiescence shown by Sir John Simon at Geneva towards the Japanese aggression in Manchuria, had shocked the people. The whole country, too, was revolted at what was happening in Abyssinia. It was being revealed that Britain had practically handed over Abyssinia to Italy. There was great sympathy with a member of the League being brutally attacked by another member, and appealing in vain for help.

In the meantime, the forces favouring a policy of support for the League of Nations and Collective Security were organizing and mobilizing. The famous 'Peace Ballot' was sent out under the auspices of the League of Nations Union and other Peace Societies. It was attacked by MacDonald, Sir John Simon, and other leaders of the 'National' Government in a way that alarmed every lover of peace. The Ballot was strongly supported in Scotland and there the Prime Minister attacked it. 'To a Glasgow audience he denounced it as being framed in such a way that 'opportunities were given to unscrupulous propagandists to use that very ballot that should be in the cause of Peace, for Party politics of the lowest kind.'

The Tory Press referred to it as the 'Blood Ballot.' In the House of Commons on 8 November 1934 Sir John Simon launched what Lord Cecil described as a 'venomous attack' on the organizers. He accused them of wilful deception in the taking of the ballot and of trying to mislead the people by framing the questions in such a way as to get, 'by hook or by crook,' a particular answer. In a strongly defamatory speech, he accused the League of Nations Union—a non-Party peace organization—of being prejudiced and partisan. It was a revealing fact of some significance that this attack was loudly cheered by the supporters of the Government.

Unable to prevent the Peace Ballot being taken, the endeavour was to prejudice its success. During the months in which it was being taken, there was in the Tory Press an

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onslaught, pertinacious as it was malicious, upon the League of Nations Union for organizing it. The unofficial referendum was assailed, too, on Tory platforms with disparagement and ridicule. As the time for closing the ballot drew near, the campaign of detraction intensified. Certain of the more popular and less responsible newspapers went from aspersion to scurrility.

Meanwhile the propaganda for the Peace Ballot got great help from a most unexpected quarter. This was by a speech by a Cabinet Minister, who obviously did not realize that he was speaking to the world and exposing the real militarist and imperialist policy of the Government. Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air, made a speech, when the ballot papers were out and awaiting signatures in millions of homes, and he must have had a tremendous effect on the result. Speaking in the House of Lords on Disarmament on 22 May 1935 he boasted of his achievement in opposing the abolition of all bombing from the air, when this proposal was before the Disarmament Conference.

He said :

‘In 1932, the Disarmament Conference assembled, and almost its earliest discussions were centred around the possibility of the total abolition of air forces, or at least the abolition of the “artillery of the air,” the bombing aeroplane, which weapon is the destructive arm of the Air Force, and to which it owes its separate existence. . . . I had the utmost difficulty at that time, amid the public outcry, in preserving the use of the bombing aeroplane even on the frontiers of the Middle East and India.’

There is no doubt that this statement, made so frankly and so callously by the political head of the most modern and most formidable of the fighting services, and broadcast widely by the Peace Societies, produced an enormous impression. It was readily realized that if it had not been for the stand taken by the British representative, speaking presumably with full authority for the British Government, air-bombing, the most deadly form of attack known in modern warfare, might by this time have been abolished. When it is remembered that, in the future, the bombing aeroplane will bring the

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civilian population well within the danger zone, is it any wonder that they should sign the Peace Ballot with eager anxiety?

The result of the ballot was an astounding revelation of the feeling in the country. More than 11,000,000 people voted, what might be called, the 'Pacifist Ticket.' This was a sensational result. As a spontaneous and conscientious expression of public opinion on the most important question of the day, it evidently astounded and frightened the Government. It upset their plans and called for a complete change in their election policy.

The Government, as has been shown, had been hostile to the ballot from the beginning. They had no means of learning how far the propaganda against their armaments policy had succeeded. They evidently believed that the people would be indifferent to the questions raised or could be persuaded to ignore the ballot. They had been confident that they could mobilize public opinion behind the Government on the defence issue and so obtain a mandate for rearmament.

Now, Mr. Baldwin is nothing if not a political strategist, but this astonishing demonstration of the direction in which the mind of the people was moving presented him with a very delicate task, which the imminence of the General Election made more difficult. Manifestly, rearmament must be pushed into the background for the time being, and some recognition conceded to the all but discarded League of Nations. The whole tenor of the speeches of Ministers must be changed, and a more moderate and conciliatory tone adopted.

Meanwhile, foreign affairs had come on to the Front Page. The Italo-Abyssinia war had begun, and Abyssinia, a member of the League of Nations, had been making heart-breaking appeals for help to the Assembly at Geneva. The policy of the British Government with regard to Abyssinia was one of aloofness. It was no immediate concern of ours. Beyond a friendly exchange of assurances with regard to British rights in that neighbourhood, we seemed inclined to allow Mussolini to carry out his policy of aggression unmolested.

After the Peace Ballot, with its definite demand for support for the League, Baldwin bowed to the storm. He instructed the Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, to change from

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what was, in fact, a policy of isolation to one of active support for the League policy. Thus, one of the most sensational incidents in the history of the Assembly took place. Delegates from all the world heard the British Foreign Secretary deliver a momentous speech, which swept the whole assembly to a frenzy of enthusiasm. He came out boldly and frankly for a policy of full and complete support of the principle of collective security. In a speech of passionate earnestness, he declared that Great Britain would stand by her pledged word and fulfil all her obligations under the Covenant of the League, regardless of consequences. This declaration, startling in its suddenness, delighted the assembled delegates. This was what they were hoping for—waiting for. Here was Britain, at last, taking the lead.

This was September, and nowhere was the Government's change of policy more welcome than at the Conference of the British Trade Union Congress. The Trade Union leaders offered their whole-hearted support to the Government, in the belief that they were sincere in this declaration.

In the following month, the annual Conference of the Labour Party was held. Here, too, the decision of the T.U.C. was confirmed. The Conference declared its support of the Government's policy, with regard to Abyssinia as far as Sir Samuel Hoare's speech indicated that policy. The Liberal leaders and the Liberal Press also accepted the Foreign Secretary's statement of policy.

Then came a stroke by Baldwin that showed him a masterly, as well as a wary, tactician. With nearly a year of Parliament still to run, with many tasks unfinished, he decided on a 'Snap Election.'

The time chosen did verily take occasion by the forelock. It was the zero hour of opportunity for the Government—the moment of maximum popularity. He could say now to the people :

'You want peace ; you have shown your anxiety that support of the League of Nations should be the Government's policy. All Parties are in agreement with me on this. I declare to you that we accept that policy. Trust me to put that policy into effect.'

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Thus Baldwin won a great electoral triumph by what was undoubtedly the most audacious political 'confidence trick' in British history.

Not for many years did the reputation of Britain stand so high as after the speech of Sir Samuel Hoare in September 1935. The reason was that by this declaration the Government were making a spectacular return to the side of the League, to the support of the policy of collective security and resistance to aggression. It meant a return to the belief by the other nations, in the sincerity and good faith of the British Government, which the policy and diplomacy of MacDonald and Simon had done so much to destroy. There could be no uncertainty as to what pledges were given by Britain, what obligations undertaken. The Foreign Secretary, speaking with grave deliberation and impressive earnestness, pledged his country's honour in these words :

'In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations, the League stands and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety and particularly for steady and collective resistance to acts of unprovoked aggression. The attitude of the British nation in the last few weeks has clearly demonstrated the fact that this is no variable and unreliable sentiment, but a principle of international conduct to which they and their Government hold with *firm, enduring, and universal* persistence.'

From the reception given to this outspoken declaration of British policy at Geneva and in the Press of the World, it was evident that this policy would be supported by the democratic nations and that Mussolini, preparing at that moment to invade Abyssinia, would certainly be stopped.

The real fact was that behind all this was a most sordid tale of despicable betrayal ; that the British Government had been guilty of the most audacious treachery. It was not known until afterwards that at the very moment that Sir Samuel Hoare was making his brave speech at Geneva, secret proposals were being prepared which would, not only set aside the League, but would outrage every principle of League policy. It was discovered later that Mussolini had been informed early in 1935 that provided British interests were safeguarded, no notice would

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be taken of his adventure in Abyssinia. When MacDonald and Simon met Mussolini at Stresa they knew that he was preparing to send an invading force into Abyssinia, yet no protest was made.

During the summer British and French diplomatists were engaged in drawing up a scheme which would give Mussolini what he wanted in Ethiopia and at the same time would not seriously affect British interests there. London and Paris, working in close co-operation with Rome, had by September completed that plan by which Mussolini would be able to achieve the substance of victory without going to war or without upsetting the balance of power in East Africa.

The one fear that haunted the Government was that their betrayal might be exposed before the General Election. If the truth leaked out then, in the state of public opinion at the time, there would be a complete overthrow of the Government and an end to the MacDonald-Baldwin administration. The Government got their first fright when some weeks before the General Election, statements began to appear in the French Press to the effect that the British Government had abandoned their wholehearted co-operation with the League. It was alleged that a conspiracy was afoot between Britain and France, behind the back of the League and indeed in defiance of the pledges given by Sir Samuel Hoare at Geneva, to force upon Abyssinia a settlement absolutely detrimental to her interests and inconsistent with the principles of the League itself. Sir John Simon indignantly repudiated this 'amazing statement' and speaking with forceful emphasis he declared :

'I speak with the authority of the Government when I say that there is no truth in this wild accusation at all.'

In spite of this denial, more evidence, drifting across from France, appeared in the British Press and a great storm of protest arose throughout the country. On 10 December, Attlee, the Leader of the Opposition, completely distrustful of the Government, brought the matter to a head by asking the Prime Minister :

'Whether before any further action is taken, this House will be informed of the nature of the proposals for the settle-

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ment of the Italo-Aybssinian war to which the Government are committed ? '

When Baldwin evaded the question there were brisk exchanges between the two leaders. Under the barrage of questions the Prime Minister became more and more 'rattled.' He dared not admit that the reports in the British and Foreign Press were accurate, as that would expose the duplicity of the Government. He admitted, however, that there had been a serious leakage of information which had made a very difficult and delicate matter incomparably more difficult and more delicate. To anyone who saw Baldwin at that moment and marked the excited nervousness, the flustered hesitancy, and obvious embarrassment of one usually so complacent, would immediately realize that he had all the appearance of one caught in the act, and was ashamed of having to conceal a discreditable intrigue.

He had more time to prepare his reply, however, when Mr. Lees Smith speaking for the Labour Party, raised the matter later in the day. In his reply, Baldwin used words which alarmed the House at the time and have been referred to many times since. Speaking of them a few weeks later, the late Sir Austen Chamberlain said that the Prime Minister 'had startled the House and the country by the use of language such as none of us have heard in our experience from a Minister of the crown.'

The words were :

'I shall be but a short time to-night. I have seldom spoken with greater regret, for my lips are not yet unsealed. Were these troubles over I would make a case, and I guarantee that not a man would go into the Lobby against us.'

There was a sudden thrill through the House as he uttered these ominous words. Members wondered what mystery lay behind them—something threatening, sinister, dangerous.

Members found out afterwards that they had been spoofed with what was merely a debating trick, to ward off awkward questions. Later, when it was discovered that the rumours were true and that the actual proposals were even worse than had been forecast, a storm of indignant protest swept the

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country. Baldwin took fright, threw over his Foreign Secretary and jettisoned the Hoare-Laval arrangement. On 19 December 1935 Attlee, on behalf of the Labour Opposition, moved in the House of Commons :

‘That the terms put forward by His Majesty’s Government as a basis for an Italo-Abyssinian settlement reward the declared aggressor at the expense of the victim, destroy collective security, and conflict with the expressed will of the country and with the Covenant of the League of Nations, to the support of which the honour of Great Britain is pledged; this House, therefore, demands that these terms be immediately repudiated.’

The Leader of the Opposition was able to show that the whole country was shocked at what had happened. He pointed out that the Government had betrayed the people of Abyssinia, betrayed the League, and betrayed the people of this country who had voted for the Prime Minister at the last election. At that election the people were asked to vote for the Prime Minister as ‘the man you can trust’ and great stress was made of his unswerving fidelity to League principles. The Government’s election manifesto said :

‘the League of Nations will remain as heretofore, the keystone of British foreign policy. . . . We shall therefore continue to do all in our power to uphold the Covenant, and to maintain and increase the efficiency of the League. In the present unhappy dispute between Italy and Abyssinia there will be no wavering in the policy we have hitherto pursued.’

MacDonald, who had kept step with Baldwin both in open support and secret antagonism to the League, had nevertheless said in his election address at Seaham :

‘Peace is the supreme concern of civilization and I believe the future of peace depends on how far the League of Nations acting as a united body can prevent aggressors from gaining advantage by war. So soon as nations band themselves together to prevent war bringing even the semblance of benefit to the aggressors that will end war and enable peace



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to be firmly established. Our chief concern in the war between Italy and Abyssinia is that it threatens to destroy the system that we have built up to protect you and your children against war. Will you help us to secure peace through the League of Nations or will you compel every Government, whatever its principles may be, to return to the old ways of militarism and war?'

That just this despicable betrayal would happen had been foreseen by many who had no faith in the reality or honesty of Baldwin's vociferated protests of loyalty to the League. Indeed this was referred to in a remarkable letter to *The Times* by Colonel Headlam, a life-long Conservative who had been Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty in Baldwin's second administration. He wrote :

'During the election campaign Socialists and Liberals constantly asserted that if a Conservative majority were returned to the House of Commons the Government would under cover of this majority take the first opportunity to buy off the Italians and so wreck the whole system of collective security. These allegations were strenuously denied by Conservative candidates on every platform in the country because they honestly believed them to be false.'

The defence put up by Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain was an attempt to push the blame on to the shoulders of Sir Samuel Hoare. The Foreign Secretary was a tired and worn-out man, much in need of a holiday and not fit to carry out a difficult and delicate task. Then, too, there was an absence of liaison between the British Embassy and Downing Street. The Prime Minister did not know what the proposals were until he got a letter at breakfast time. Before he had time to study the document the leakage took place. He had to decide quickly. This defence is both ambiguous and contradictory. As the proposals were drafted long before the Foreign Secretary went to Paris, his physical condition was not a factor in the case. There were no difficult negotiations to be carried through. The proposals were known to M. Laval and probably through him to Mussolini. Nor could the British Prime Minister honestly plead ignorance of the proposals. It is now known

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that during the memorable meeting of the Assembly of the League at which Sir Samuel Hoare made his sensational speech at Geneva in September 1935, the Prime Minister, holidaying at Aix-les-Bains, met Count de Chambrun, then French Ambassador to Rome, and communicated to him the chief features of the plan. The action of the Government with regard to sanctions was in line with their secret policy. The timid, make-shift sanctions imposed against Italy had never been intended to succeed. The British Government had been determined to limit them to measures which, they knew, would be ineffective in stopping Italian aggression in Abyssinia, but would have a certain bargaining value in the protection of Imperial interests. They were the merest make-believe mainly intended to pacify public opinion, in view of the approaching General Election, and to make a pretence of fulfilling the pledge given at Geneva.

It is said that shortly after Sir Samuel Hoare's speech in September, Laval was asked his opinion of Britain's new anti-Italian policy. With a cynical smile, a shrug of his shoulders, and a wrist-turning, palm-showing gesture of his hands he said :

'But it is the British way the more it changes the more it is the same--it shall change again after--the General Election.'

When, after the election, the Council of the League met to afford the 'Hoare-Laval' plan an indecent burial, the French statesman repeated his characteristic Gallic gesture to emphasize a *bon mot* which was the French equivalent of 'I told you so !'

As a result of this exposure, Baldwin had to admit that people in all parts of the country, and of all parties, had been shocked at what had been done in their name.

'I was not expecting that deeper feeling which was manifested by many of my hon. friends and friends in many parts of the country on what I may call the ground of conscience and of honour. The moment I am confronted with that I know that something has happened that has appealed to the deepest feelings of our countrymen, that

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some note has been struck that brings back from them a response from the depths.'

In these significant words Baldwin confesses that his action wounded the deepest feelings of his countrymen where they are most sensitive- their conscience and their honour. His words are an indictment of himself, and no indictment could be more justified.

It was a memorable occasion in the House of Commons when Sir Samuel Hoare made his speech of personal explanation on his resignation from the Government. The sympathy of the whole House was with him, as it was recognized that he was merely a scapegoat for the Government. By all the canons of justice and fairness Baldwin, MacDonald, and the Cabinet ought to have stood by their colleague and resigned with him. After all, the head and front of his offending was in proposing a scheme which had the authority and was the joint responsibility of the Cabinet. Sir Samuel Hoare's speech is important, however, for an admission of grave significance. Speaking of the oil sanctions, he said :

'It seemed clear that, supposing an oil embargo were to be imposed, and that the non-member States took an effective part in it, the oil embargo might have such an effect upon hostilities as to force their termination.'

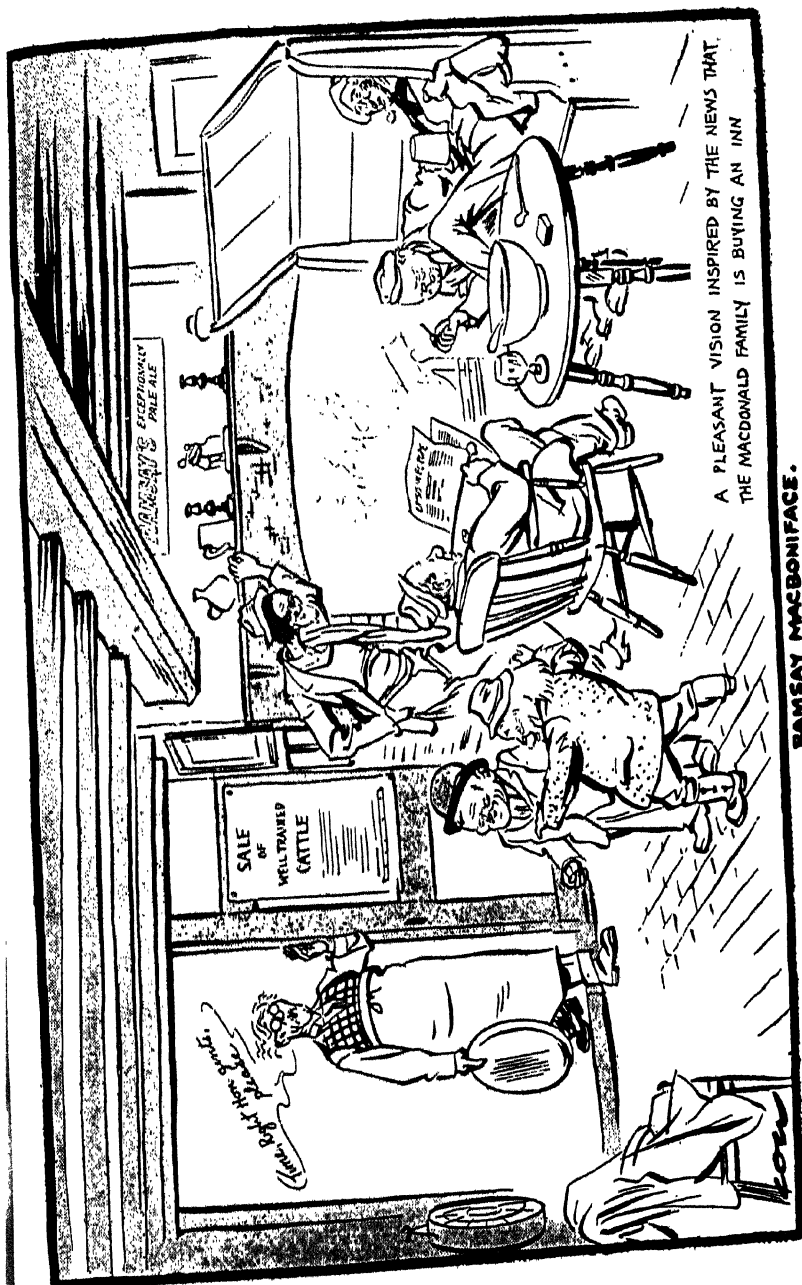
Thus at last, in a few words, the truth came out. It was revealed that in defiance of all their pledges, the British Government were secretly favouring Italy as against Abyssinia, and were determined that the oil sanction must not be imposed as it might bring the war to an end. The people, in their innocence, had thought that was the one and only reason for imposing it.

The British Government were determined not to take any action that might prevent Mussolini winning the war in Abyssinia. As they had been when Japan first invaded China in 1932, they were definitely on the side of the aggressor and for the same reason. They recognized that the failure of the attack on Abyssinia would have immediate repercussions. If Mussolini suffered a defeat his prestige in Italy would be ruined. Conditions in that country were such that a revolt

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of the enslaved people against the dictator would be inevitable. If the democratic forces, secret but still surviving, could seize their long-awaited opportunity, the downfall of the Duce would be certain, and the end of the Fascist regime inevitable.

The Government feared that if a revolution took place in Italy and the Fascist dictatorship were overthrown, it would be followed by a Labour Government. This must be prevented at all costs. In a conflict between Fascism and Democracy in Italy or elsewhere, the support of the 'National' Government would go to the former. The imposition of the oil sanction might lead in the end to the fall of Fascism, and therefore no oil sanction shall be imposed. Sir Samuel Hoare had said that oil sanctions must not be imposed because they might be successful and bring the war to an end. So the Baldwin-MacDonald Government had decreed. The slaughter in Abyssinia must go on, lest the Fascist regime be overthrown and a democratic Government take its place. The mass-massacre of an innocent people must continue lest the prestige of a tyrant be impaired. The citizens of Abyssinia must be slain to maintain the authority of Mussolini, and the women and children of bombed Addis Ababa butchered to make a Roman holiday.



A PLEASANT VISION INSPIRED BY THE NEWS THAT  
THE MACDONALD FAMILY IS BUYING AN INN

RAMSAY MACBONIFACE.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

### *HOW A NATION WAS HOAXED*

‘You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.’—ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

**T**he General Election of 1935 was the most remarkable example of the political confidence trick in British history. That it was such a piece of deception was cynically admitted and stoutly defended by the trickster himself. It is almost beyond belief that a British Prime Minister should have the effrontery to stand before the House of Commons and confess ‘that to win the General Election, to retain his own party in office, he had to descend to deception and misrepresentation. Yet on 12 November 1936 Mr. Baldwin, then Prime Minister, told the House of Commons that if he had not hoaxed the electors he would not have won the election and would therefore have been unable to carry out his Party’s rearmament policy. The hoax was unique in having as its first result a victory which was of the nature of comedy, but in its later consequences there emerged the element of grim tragedy. The hoax was significant in its having the essential element of mischievous deception by which the credulity of the nation was successfully exploited. Finally, the hoax was put over in a remarkable series of speeches, on the platform and on the radio, redolent with the Baldwinian spell-binding characteristics of emotional appeal, spiritual unction, disarming candour, ingenuous whimsicality, the carpet-slipped case of the chimney corner and the tang of the post-prandial pipe, withal.

It had not been anticipated, when the House gathered on that day that anything unusual was going to happen. The debate on the Address had already dragged on for six days, and on the seventh there was a Liberal Amendment on the private manufacture of arms. No one could foresee that from

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an undistinguished opening there should develop one of those classic encounters between two doughty antagonists which stand out in the annals of Parliament like illuminations on a medieval manuscript. Baldwin and Churchill are old adversaries. As orators they resembled Cicero and Catiline and each could have taken the other's rôle. Since Churchill left the 'Shadow Cabinet' he had had many spectacular bouts with Baldwin, one of which, on the India Bill threatened seriously to split the Conservative Party.

This time the duel arose on a matter, not only of paramount importance in itself, but for reasons of parliamentary tactics, ideal for Churchill's purpose. The Safety of the People.' What a classic theme! *Salus populi suprema est lex.* The safety of the people is the supreme task of any Government. Cicero's great philippic against Catiline had for its text the Senate's decree: 'That the Consuls should take care that the Republic receive no harm.' It was the indictment of Churchill that the safety and security of the British people were in grave jeopardy through the negligence, delay, and vacillation of the Government, and for this held Baldwin directly responsible.

Rising from his seat on the Front Bench below the gangway on the flank of the Treasury Bench, where literally and metaphorically he is a thorn in the side of the Government, Churchill proceeded to deliver one of those speeches which have made him famous as the only orator left in the Conservative Party. His speeches are admirable compositions and have the literary brilliance which one would expect from such a master of English prose. He deals hammer blows at his antagonist but, as was said of Carlyle, it is a trip-hammer with an æolian attachment. His attack on Baldwin on this occasion was formidable, vigorous, and uncompromising. He had absolute mastery of his brief, his argument was reasonable, and his analysis acute. He could fairly claim that for four years he had sounded a note of alarm on this question of defence. He had been, in fact, an unregarded John the Baptist crying in the wilderness: 'Flee from the wrath to come.' Latterly his warning cry had come to be more heard and heeded, and his support in the House had become large enough to be alarming to the Government.

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Some months before this in a very important debate on the Ministry of Defence (Creation) Bill, the late Sir Austen Chamberlain, who was the most influential leader of the Conservative Party in the country, had delivered what amounted to an attack on Baldwin for his blunders and failures with regard to the whole defence situation. Speaking with impressive gravity he said :

‘ Is it to be wondered at that some of us who are not alarmists now feel profoundly anxious. . . . The Prime Minister has twice stood at the table of this House within the last two years to ask the pardon of the House.’

Churchill’s indictment took the same form. He accused Baldwin of neglecting this important question. He spoke of the delay, of ‘ the year that the locusts had eaten.’ In the course of his speech he revealed a complete failure to appreciate the protean proclivities of the Premier. Quoting two contradictory statements from Baldwin’s speeches, he confessed himself baffled that the Prime Minister could, in one speech pledge himself to a great increase in armaments, and in another say : ‘ I give you my word there will be no great armaments.’ Churchill thought of every reason but the real one. He could not understand how Baldwin could do a double somersault and land on his feet. He had only accused Baldwin of dilatoriness, he could not believe him guilty of duplicity. The answer to the riddle of course lies in the dates of the speeches ; one was nearer the General Election than the other. The gravamen of his case was contained in one paragraph :

‘ The Government simply cannot make up their mind, or they cannot get the Prime Minister to make up his mind. So they go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent. So we go on preparing more months and years—precious, perhaps vital to the greatness of Britain—for the locusts to eat. They will say to me, “ a Minister of Supply is not necessary, for all is going well.” I deny it. “ The position is satisfactory.” It is not true. “ All is proceeding according to plan.” We know what that means.’



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When Churchill sat down after a peroration, eloquent but restrained, expressing surprise, regret, and warning, Members in all parts of the House felt that he had made his case.

It was nearly two hours afterwards that Baldwin rose and stepped to the box to reply to Churchill. His wan smile, fidgeting fingers, unsteady voice, and nervous manner, betrayed an agitation that he seemed anxious to conceal. He might well be worried, for to him as Leader and Prime Minister the position was difficult if not critical. This was a challenge to his leadership as formidable as he had had to face early in 1931. At that time, too, the revolt centred round Churchill, and he would have been discarded had not MacDonald, another threatened leader, joined him for their mutual protection. The Baldwin-Must-Go campaign which seemed to have a calculable periodicity had broken out again. This time the revolt arose from a question upon which any leader must be peculiarly vulnerable. He knew Churchill had strong backing in the House. He knew that over two hundred had expressed their anxiety on the re-armament position: a number easily sufficient to overthrow the Government. He knew how easily the Premier can be removed. He remembered a Prime Minister who was driven from office on a defence question—the inadequate supply of cordite. He knew that he was not so popular personally in the House as he was in the country. The number of troublesome discards from the Government that sprinkled the back benches behind him was testimony to his ruthlessness.

Up to 1934 Baldwin's defence was absolute. He could show that from 1931 there were the more immediate points of the 'National' Government's programme to be carried through. These included: cuts in unemployment benefit, lowering of wage standards, increase in prices, reduction in social services, adjustment of taxation, and Protection. It was to do these things that the 'National' Government was brought into being. It would have been difficult, especially during an alleged financial stringency, to defend large scale expenditure on armaments, until they had been undertaken. The battleground was the period from 1934. Indeed, the dominating charge in Churchill's indictment could be narrowed down to the comprehensive question: Why did Baldwin in 1934 not

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launch a great armament programme? Baldwin's reply was, to a Conservative, overwhelming, decisive, and completely unanswerable. All he had to do was to ask one question: Would a *Labour* Government have gone in for a great rearmament programme? The question answers itself. A Labour Government would not support this Conservative policy.

The immediate task before Baldwin at that time therefore was to win the General Election. In a democratic country the people choose the Government by a free election. The one decisive fact, the only factor worth considering was that in 1934 the people believed in a policy of support of the League of Nations, Collective Security and Disarmament. That is a policy diametrically opposed to the rearmament and isolationist policy of the Government. Baldwin himself in the debate, supplied the evidence of this:

'There was probably a stronger pacifist feeling running through this country than at any time since the War.'

'The Disarmament Conference was sitting at that time in Geneva.'

'At the election at Fulham, a seat which the National Government held was lost by about 7000 votes on no other issue but the pacifist.'

'The National Government candidate who made a most guarded reference to defence was mobbed for it.'

Finally, although Baldwin didn't mention it, the Peace Ballot, with its 11,000,000, was absolutely conclusive.

In view of these facts the issue was clear cut and definite. The Government were determined on a programme of great rearmaments: the people, in Baldwin's view, were as definitely opposed to such a programme. Thus what was Baldwin as Prime Minister to do? If he had been a sincere democrat, willing to accept the verdict of the people, he would have set about a great evangelising campaign to turn the people from their Geneva heresies. But even had he wished to do this it would have taken too long. A General Election must come in 1936 at the latest. 'A democracy,' Baldwin had declared, 'is always two years behind the dictator.' There wasn't that time.

To Churchill there was no problem at all. His way was as

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decisive and characteristic. He would have rushed forward at once with a rearmament programme and damned the consequences. Now it might be true that the opposition of the people could be ignored if the Government had four or five years to carry through its programme. But with an imminent General Election and the mood of the people being what it was, the result would be the complete overthrow of the Government and with it would go the whole rearmament scheme. Of that Baldwin was absolutely convinced. As he told the House :

‘ It is my firm conviction that had the Government, with this great majority, used that majority to do anything that might be described as arming without a mandate . . . had I taken such action as my right hon. friend desired me to take, it would have defeated entirely the end I had in view.’

So far Baldwin was doing well. He had Churchill, so to speak, out on a limb while he was busy with a saw. He had completely countered the charge of dilatoriness and delay. He had shown that having regard to the mood of the people at the time, to have gone ahead with a rearmament programme would have been suicide for the Government. Such a long-term programme could only be carried through by a ‘ National ’ Government, and one with a full term before it. Baldwin could have ended on that note as he had answered Churchill’s arraignment and in refuting him he had rehabilitated himself. But Churchill’s diatribe was a challenge to his leadership. It remained, therefore, for him to show what a great and successful leader he was. Now the greatest achievement of a political leader is to lead his Party to victory at a General Election.

Here Baldwin had to make a difficult decision. If he wished to confute completely his opponent he would have to make a clean breast of the fact that to win the General Election of 1935, he had been guilty of gross misrepresentation. He would have to make public confession of a course of conduct which must shock all who heard it, and which might go far to destroy that reputation for simple-minded honesty which he had been so sedulously anxious to cultivate through the years. On the

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other hand, he was willing to allow any kudos for his prowess, be it even in political chicanery, to go by default.

His story lost nothing in the manner of its narration. Conversationally, almost wistfully, he proceeds to tell the tale. He isn't arguing, he is just talking. With his left elbow on the box, he leans smilingly forward and 'puts it over.' Talking quietly in off-hand, free and easy tones, he becomes intimate and flatteringly familiar as he takes his friend's arm, as it were, and leads him up the garden. His way of making his case was a masterpiece of presentation. After an exordium of historical references he goes on to make his avowal. Fearing lest his hearers be unduly alarmed or shocked, he began quietly with a significant warning :

'I put before the whole House my views with appalling frankness. My position as the leader of a great party was not altogether a comfortable one. I asked myself what chance was there—when that feeling that was given expression to in Fulham was common throughout the country—what chance was there within the next year or two of that feeling being so changed that the country would give a mandate for rearmament ? . . . I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election, from my point of view, more certain.'<sup>1</sup>

But the election must be won. To allow Labour to become the Government of the day would be a major disaster. If the country is going pacifist and will only vote for a pacifist policy, I will go pacifist for the duration of the election ! '*Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*' (Who knows not how to dissimulate, knows not how to reign) was all the Latin Louis IX thought the Dauphin needed to know. 'Simulation,' says Steele, 'is a pretence of what is not : Dissimulation, a concealment of what is.' Baldwin practised both. The *volte-face*.

Saul on the way to Damascus never had a speedier conversion or saw the light quicker than the Prime Minister on his way to the 'penitent form.' With all the enthusiasm of the new convert, he hastens to give his testimony. Once he was blind, now he sees, and proceeds to denounce his former heresies. Before his conversion he had at Glasgow condemned collective security

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, Vol. 317, p. 1144.

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as 'impracticable,' now he declares that 'collective security and collective action can alone save us.'<sup>1</sup> In the House of Commons, 18 May 1934, unredeemed, he condemned sanctions: believer, before the election, he acclaimed them: backslider after the election, he denounced them again. Gathering spiritual fervour as the election day approached he becomes more emphatic. In a broadcast, 25 October 1935:

'We do not want and no one will propose huge forces for this country.'

On 28 October:

'There has not been, there is not and there will not be any question of huge armaments or materially increased forces.'

On 30 October:

'I will never stand for a policy of great armaments.'

On 31 October, in a speech to the International Peace Society:

'I give you my word that there will be no great armaments.'

Finally: 'You can surely trust me by now,' on a hundred thousand hoardings.

Thus did he show how complete was his renunciation of the great rearmament policy he had hoped to inaugurate. Thus by representing himself as believing in a policy to which, in reality, he was opposed, he persuaded millions of people to vote for him. Thus he defends his conduct:

'All I did was to take a moment perhaps less unfortunate than another might have been, and we won the election with a large majority; but, frankly, I could conceive that we should at that time, by advocating certain courses, have been a great deal less successful.'<sup>2</sup>

Worst of all, he had the audacity to claim that the majority thus obtained gave him a mandate, not for the policy that he

<sup>1</sup> Government Election Manifesto.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 317, p. 1145.

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had professed, but for the policy which he repeatedly repudiated. His actual words were :

‘ We got from the country—with a large majority—a mandate for doing a thing that no one twelve months before would have believed possible.’

Now by definition, a mandate represents ‘ the instructions as to policy given by the electors to a Member of Parliament.’ For Baldwin, after explaining how he had hoodwinked the electors, to claim that the people gave him a mandate for rearmament, was surely the quintessence of shameless audacity.

Never before in the history of Parliament has a Prime Minister made such a humiliating and damaging confession. He could do so with impunity as he believed that if he had not practised this dissimulation his Government would not have reached the Treasury Bench ; many of those who now sat so awkwardly silent behind him would not have reached Parliament at all. Baldwin himself had admitted that if he had pursued the straightforward course, it would have meant the overthrow of the ‘ National ’ Government. It might have been expected, therefore, that many Members, realizing that they owed their seats to misrepresentation, would have refused to benefit by such trickery and felt themselves compelled to take the honourable course of resigning from Parliament. Now, the ‘ National ’ Government in 1931 had a majority of 494 over the Opposition. To defeat the Government then at least 250 Members must lose their seats. Verily a holocaust of the parliamentary ‘ lame ducks.’

Here a very serious question emerges. If Baldwin got his majority by misrepresentation, then he had no moral right either to accept the Premiership or to form a Government. His confession a year after the election, that he had hoodwinked the electorate as to his policy because he knew he would be defeated if he revealed it, should have been followed immediately by his resignation.

Whether the end justifies the means : whether when the end is lawful the means are also lawful : whether the intention sanctifies the deed, have been the themes of theologians and moral philosophers through the centuries. No doubt he counted the end—the defeat of the Labour Party in the forthcoming

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election, the escape from the disaster of a Labour Government, the return in triumph of the 'National' Government—so desirable a consummation that the sacrifice of anything, even his own reputation, was as dust in the balance in comparison.

'It is always best on these occasions,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'to do as the mob do.' 'But suppose there are two mobs,' suggested Mr. Snodgrass. 'Shout with the largest,' said Mr. Pickwick. Baldwin did not stand like the Schoolman's Ass, irresolute betwixt equal motives. He had no scrupulous hesitation in making his decision between tremendous alternatives: to choose whether to be honest and be defeated, or to be deceitful with the chance of winning. He chose deception. It has to be remembered that it was Baldwin who is credited with the sublime cynicism:

'I would rather be an opportunist and float than go to the bottom with my principles round my neck.'

It was evident that Churchill overlooked what were definitely the two dominating factors in the situation, the nearness of the General Election and the attitude of the majority of the people towards a rearmament programme. These two facts alone justified Baldwin's policy of circumspection, postponement and delay.

It is difficult to say whether the 'measure' or the 'man' was the determining factor in the victory of 1935. Certainly both contributed. The League of Nations policy was likened to a popular personality. But while it was Dr. Jekyll who won the General Election, it was Mr. Hyde that took office. The result of the election was a personal vote of confidence in Baldwin, a tribute to his popularity. His hold over the British mind was exceptional. He cast a spell over the people just as he so often did over the House of Commons, and the hoodwinked millions voted for him as the 'man you can trust,' the plain honest statesman who would keep things right. He had worked up in the country such a legend around himself that the people would not doubt the genuineness of his renunciation of the arms programme or question the sincerity of his protestations of loyalty to the League. The people voted for

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him because they trusted him. He had achieved his own apotheosis.

To the historian of the future it must appear strange that Baldwin after this exposure of himself was not impeached. Why was there not a great public up-surge of protest as in the Hoare-Laval scandal? One reason was the hopelessness of stirring up an agitation against one so popular. Another was the lapse of time—his ‘appalling frankness’ speech was made more than a year after the General Election—during which time the Government had been busily and successfully scare-mongering and stampeding public opinion in the interests of their rearmament programme.

The Hoare-Laval case was different. The policy of the ‘National’ Government then was to keep the proposals secret, let France or someone else sponsor the scheme at Geneva, but for Britain to keep as aloof as possible until it became safe to support it. The French disclosures spoiled that little game. Then the element of urgency emerged. The storm of public indignation blew up so suddenly and unexpectedly that Baldwin had to make a quick gesture to meet it. Several dramatic scenes were staged in the House of Commons: the Prime Minister’s sensational repudiation of his Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare’s resignation and the disclosures in his speech explaining it, his shielding of Baldwin by his acceptance of responsibility and finally his going ostentatiously out of the Government, out of the front door of the Foreign Office, to be taken in, after a decent interval, by the back door of the Admiralty.

In this case it would take time before Baldwin’s breach of faith was realized. Two of the chief points in his policy were not unconnected: rearmament and antagonism to the League of Nations. One was as important to him as the other. Rearmament could begin at once, but secretly and gradually. As for opposition to the League, that also could begin at once, for it would be some time before isolated incidents of sabotage could be recognized as the consequences of the Government’s deliberate policy. In the meantime the war scare could be worked up as the justification for both rearmament and anti-League policy.

Still, after all, it does seem strange that a leader of the people



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should plead guilty to such disreputable conduct and remain uncondemned. One reason for his escape may be that suddenly something happened that stirred the hearts of the people and turned the minds of all from the political scene to the Throne itself. A few days after the Prime Minister appeared in sack-cloth and ashes in the House of Commons, King Edward VIII was laying aside the crown of his fathers. Afterwards, in the pomp and circumstance, the reflected blaze and glory of the Coronation, Baldwin escaped to the safety of the House of Lords, leaving all his problems to his successor.

Never before in the history of parliaments has a Prime Minister made such a humiliating confession. Who could imagine the great political leaders of the past stooping to such despicable perfidy.

Few Premiers have lost caste sooner. The people are already moving towards a new and truer assessment of his character. He went in a blaze of reflected glory which will serve to make the oblivion to which he has gone the more pronounced. In congenial company in the House of Lords he will have time to review the record of his career. What he will no doubt regard as the most notable of his achievements is the part he played in the sabotaging of the Disarmament Conference, and in the virtual annihilation of the League of Nations.

For Britain, for Europe and for the world, the consequences of Baldwin's victory in 1935 have been tremendous and terrible. For the steady and continuous deterioration in the international situation, the blame lies largely with the British Government. During Baldwin's tenure of office repeated breeches of pledges have discredited the name of Britain. Actions for which he, as Prime Minister, was responsible, have destroyed all faith in British statesmanship. No statesman of modern times had a greater opportunity to accomplish great things for his people and for the world : none so signally failed to take advantage of them. He may have done good by stealth, the rest is on record. He has made loud protestations of faith in great international ideals, while he secretly intrigued for their betrayal. Three times in three months his honour has been publicly impugned in the House of Commons. When the 'National' Government solemnly pledged Britain to fulfil her obligations under the Covenant of the League of Nations,

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fifty nations ranged themselves on her side. Had Britain kept her word, the League would have become paramount and the direction and drive of world politics would have been turned in the direction of international co-operation and world peace. Had Britain kept her word, the invasion of Abyssinia would have come to a sudden and decisive end.<sup>1</sup> The prestige of Mussolini in Italy could not have survived his failure in Africa. The League of Nations, which would thus have acquired power and authority, would definitely have meant the end of dictatorships in Europe.

When after the election Baldwin before the eyes of the world, renounced his pledges, he struck a deadly blow at the authority of the League and destroyed absolutely the cause of collective security. Shocked and disillusioned the League of Nations lost faith in the honour of British statesmen. Baldwin's betrayal gave a free hand to the dictators, of which they were quick to take advantage.

International law lost all authority. The dictators suddenly realized that they could work their will with impunity.

With the League of Nations discredited and deserted, power politics took the place of the reign of law, a new age of primitive barbarism was ushered in and the dictators, east and west, began to march. Hitler, repudiating his treaty obligations, marched first into the Rhineland and then into Austria. Mussolini marched into demilitarized Spain. Japan marched into China. And now the world from Tokio to Washington with frantic fury arms for Armageddon.

There is no doubt that the British people still put their trust in the setting up of a system by which the rule of law should take the place of the rule of force. In 1935 Baldwin would not listen to the voice of the people, and the voice of the people was never more truly the voice of God. That voice was not heeded ; the will of the people for peace was spurned, the desire of the democracy for international co-operation in the cause of peace repudiated.

For the world chaos and the international crimes that followed, for the atrocities in China, for the brutalities in Abyssinia, for the butchery in Spain, the British Prime Minister must bear a major responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> Mussolini's admissions in Marshal Badoglio's book on the Abyssinian Campaign confirm this.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

### *THE DEFEAT AT SEAHAM*

**T**he holding of a General Election on 14 November 1935 was a shrewd piece of political strategy. No time could have suited MacDonald better. The election campaign would be waged in the middle of an international crisis. It was claimed that it was necessary to get a mandate from the country for the support of the League of Nations in the enforcement of the League's Covenant. MacDonald would thus be able to make eloquent speeches on Peace, Collective Security, and Foreign Affairs. This was particularly fortunate, as the 'National' Government's record on home affairs was disastrous. By exploiting the international situation of the moment, MacDonald could divert the minds of the miners of Seaham and of their wives from home conditions to foreign dangers.

Seaham Harbour had been built in 1828 by an ancestor of the present Marquis of Londonderry, to provide a short cut to the sea and facilitate the export of coal from the mines on his adjacent property. The miners regarded the Marquis with the sullen hostility which has come to be the habitual attitude of the miners towards the mine-owner. Knowing this, Mr. Sidney Webb, who had nursed the constituency with care, had warned MacDonald that, if his friendship with Lord Londonderry became known, it would be resented by the miners and might affect his electoral chances.

When MacDonald was formally adopted in 1928, as Labour candidate for the Seaham division, some newspapers accused him of flying from an unsafe seat to a safe one. His reply was that Aberavon was 'as safe as the Bank of England,' but required a good deal of time to look after. 'I am not so young as I was,' he said: 'my hands are full of many things, and I cannot find time to look after the constituency myself.' How safe Sidney Webb had made Seaham was seen

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from the fact that, in 1929, MacDonald had a record majority of 28,794 votes. By 1931 his majority had slumped to 5951. A fear that the majority might disappear altogether obsessed him and caused him in 1935 to hesitate between fighting there again and seeking a safer seat elsewhere.

Ever since the *coup* of 1931, MacDonald had looked forward to the next appeal to the country with considerable apprehension. After all that had happened then and since, he dreaded having to face the Seaham electors. He was under no illusions. He knew that every day's delay was lessening his chances of holding the seat. A suggestion, sent out as a feeler, that Mr. Noel Skelton, who held the safe Tory seat of the Scottish Universities, might resign in his favour was discussed tentatively, but dismissed as risky. So up to Seaham MacDonald went at the beginning of the electoral campaign. But even there he was as infirm of purpose as in London—so much so that the pressmen who went north to 'cover' the ex-Premier's contest found it impossible to pin him down to a positive statement as to whether he intended to stand at Seaham or not. Obviously he wished to test the atmosphere before committing himself.

Seaham Harbour is one of the most forlorn and unattractive constituencies in all England. It is a division of small, unsightly mining villages, stretched unevenly across a bleak landscape—stark congeries of colliers' cottages, like beads on a string, in the sad hinterland of the north-east coast. The houses are mean, dilapidated, and ugly, built, manifestly not as homes for citizens but as sleeping places for hands, with no regard to comfort or amenity.

Seaham had been struck hard by the depression and had sunk beneath the blow until it had become classed as a distressed area. The majority of its workers were miners on the dole, and, worse still, on the means test. Years of unemployment had brought the miners to a mood of either broken-hearted dejection or bitter resentment. The endless, unfair fight against poverty, the worry, the fever, the fret of trying to make ends meet on a mere pittance, had broken the spirit of many of the men, had prematurely aged their women-folk, and had robbed the children of food to such an extent that malnutrition was rife among them. In Seaham, all questions

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came down to the life and death struggle with want. The great international issues had to be translated there into terms of food, employment, wages, and the 'dole.' In that unhappy place, politics was a bread and butter business.

The Durham miner is a distinctive personality. He is a skilled craftsman, intelligent, courageous, and trustworthy. Politically advanced, with high ideals, his most outstanding characteristics are fidelity to a cause and loyalty to a leader. His faith in MacDonald was shown by the fact that, in 1929, he gave him a majority of 28,794. Seaham was a gift seat from the miners to the Labour Party—an acknowledgment of MacDonald's services to the movement and a tribute to his personality.

A comparison between the meetings in Seaham would be interesting and informative. In the General Election of 1929 MacDonald came before them with the prestige of a great international statesman—the idolized leader of the Labour Party. He was asking for support in a constituency overwhelmingly Labour. He received the homage of his cheering admirers like a film star making a personal appearance at a *première*. When he formed the 'National' Government in 1931, there was a change; the first signs of disaffection appeared. The Labour Government had been overthrown, and many believed that he was the prime mover in that *coup*. MacDonald vehemently declared, however, that it was he who had stuck to his Socialist principles, while the Labour Ministers had deserted theirs. The slogan popular on 'National' Government platforms at the time was: 'The Labour Government ran away.'

There was at least electoral uncertainty at Seaham in 1931. There were those, especially among the women, who were willing to give MacDonald the benefit of the doubt. MacDonald's contest was the focal point of the General Election, and his victory was quite unexpected. It was thought that he would have no chance against the official Labour candidate in a constituency wholly devoted to mining. It is said that of the two hundred journalists who followed him into that strange constituency, not one believed that he would win. This, although all the way on his journey north he had been cheered and fêted and interviewed. But, at Seaham, it was as

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if they had run into a fog. His reception there was chilling. Thus, in an atmosphere gloomy and forbidding, did Seaham welcome Britain's Prime Minister, on the eve of one of the most critical and momentous General Elections since the War. Yet the result was a 6000 majority for him.

The essential characteristics of the Seaham Election of 1931 were Fear and Faith. There is nothing that the working classes in this country dread as much as destitution. MacDonald, brought up in a working-class home, knew of this fear and adapted his election tactics to exploit it. He thoroughly frightened the miners of Seaham and their wives—especially their wives—with stories of starvation in Germany. He waved a bank-note for thousands of marks and said that it was worth nothing. He warned his hearers that, if Labour were returned to power, credit would collapse so far that their ten-shilling notes and one-pound notes would become as worthless as the German note, and that it would take a thousand pounds to buy a postage stamp. The result was that the electors of Seaham were stampeded, and voted for MacDonald and the 'National' Government in a panic of fear.

Then there was Faith. There was the dogged, unshakable loyalty of the miners and their wives. They simply could not believe that their idolized hero could be a traitor and a renegade. They were carried away by the Prime Minister's personality, his glowing periods, his imagery, and, as much as anything, by his obvious appeal to sympathy, based on his long service to the Labour movement. After the election, it dawned upon them that MacDonald, who had so often attacked the Tories, was now in friendly association with them, but by that time the deed was done.

By 1935, bitter experience had swept away the glamour and glow of personality. In the preceding four years the miners of Seaham had gone through hell. Low wages and no wages, vast unemployment, the brutal means test, unfair economy schemes, the destructive effects of tariffs on the coal trade, had made them bitter and resentful. Their idol had crashed. They had had four years of disillusionment. They now saw MacDonald in the ranks of their enemies, attacking them just as cruelly as his Tory friends did. The indictment against him had many counts. He had hindered rather than

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helped the coal trade ; he had refused to ratify the International Convention agreed upon at Geneva in 1931, which aimed at reducing working hours ; he had associated with the Londonderrys, in spite of Sidney Webb's warning ; he had indulged in spiteful references to the Labour Government of which he was the head ; he had treated contemptuously the means test petition, signed by over 22,000 electors in his constituency ; and he was regarded as having betrayed them with regard to the Co-operative Societies Tax, over which the women were furious.

MacDonald was particularly unfortunate in his opponent. Emanuel Shinwell, the Labour candidate, had been from 1922 until his defeat in 1931, Member of Parliament for the Scots county division of Linlithgowshire. He had graduated from the Glasgow Town Council, of which for seven years he had been a notable member, with a reputation as a clever and resourceful debater. Shinwell was an experienced parliamentary campaigner, having fought seven General Elections. His outstanding ability had been recognized when, in 1924, MacDonald made him Parliamentary Secretary to the Mines Department of the Board of Trade.

During the nine years that Shinwell had been in Parliament, he had enhanced his reputation as a skilful speaker and exceptionally keen debater. His style is incisive and forcible. He watches a debate with an alert vigilance, and his interventions are as felicitous as they are effective.

When Mr. J. H. Thomas, the confidant of MacDonald, was asked, some months before the General Election, his views on MacDonald's chances at Seaham, he was cheerily optimistic. 'Phew !' he said, 'Mac'll walk home. You can put your shirt on that, m'lad. My God ! man, there's nothing surer.' 'How can you be so sure ?' he was asked, 'Shinwell is a clever and experienced campaigner.' Thomas's retort was : 'Clever m'foot ! Mac'll win easy, and I'll tell you why : Shinwell will make him win. Mark my words and see if he don't.'

Behind Thomas's strange forecast was his belief that Shinwell would use his opportunity to attack MacDonald in revenge for 1931. He believed that Shinwell, fiery and quick-tempered, with a decided proclivity to caustic invective, would go out of his way to insult the older candidate and descend to

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scurrilous and disparaging personalities. This, in the circumstances, would cause a reaction against the Labour candidate and create sympathy for MacDonald. But Thomas, wily strategist that he is, was quite mistaken on two points. He had reckoned on Shinwell's reputed irascibility without taking into account his intelligence and good sense. Besides, Thomas was forgetting that MacDonald was, himself, excitable and extremely irritable, and inclined to lose his temper when attacked, as indeed he did, with disastrous results during the election of 1924.

This was seen quite early in the campaign. Shinwell was very discreet and hardly mentioned his opponent at all. MacDonald, on the other hand, when he saw the line Shinwell was taking, thought to rile him into retorting with contemptuous aspersion. Thus the campaign was not without an element of comedy—one side ostentatiously ignoring the opponent and making no reply to personal attacks, the other deliberately provocative, seeking to drive the quick-tempered Labour candidate to tactless retaliation.

The contrast that Thomas so hopefully envisaged of the dignified and revered Elder Statesman attacked by an unlicked, splenetic spitfire did not materialize. There was no alienation of votes from Shinwell because of his election behaviour. The alienation was all the other way.

A speech made by MacDonald in London, at the beginning of the campaign, caused great annoyance to the miners' section of the Seaham electorate. There had been a nation-wide agitation by the miners for the restoration of a national wage-fixing organization. Such an organization is accepted by every large industry as a matter of course. Now, before MacDonald joined the 'National' Government, he had been an enthusiastic advocate of this most reasonable claim. The miners, therefore, were anxious to know if he still believed in it and if he could assure them of the Government's support. His answer, anxiously awaited, was a mockery of a serious and urgent appeal. He assured them that 'every assistance it can' would be given, not by the Government, but by his own trumpery organization, the 'National Labour' Party. The speech was so characteristically non-committal and deceptive that it infuriated those miners who heard it in London. To the miners



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of Seaham it was but another example of MacDonald's desertion.

One reason for the failure of MacDonald's speeches was a change of policy which affected more or less all 'National' Government speakers during this strange election. This was the change in the strategy of the campaign brought about by Baldwin's sudden decision to exploit the Peace Ballot. Before that, the platform was: the failure of the League, the imminence of war, and Britain's need to rearm in defence. Now, Tory headquarters announced a complete change of programme—a swing back to the League, Britain to carry out all her obligations under the Covenant, a stressing of the Peace issue, and the stigmatizing of the Labour Party as the War Party. It meant a wholesale remodelling of speeches.

Even one so skilled as MacDonald in political legerdemain found difficulty in adapting his speech to this sudden *volte-face*. Indeed, it was specially awkward for MacDonald, as the White Paper on rearmament which had started Britain on the arms race had been signed J. R. M. To switch over from militarism to pacifism, changing a political creed to meet the exigencies of the political situation was a matter of such difficulty that there were Tory candidates who gave up addressing meetings. Their excuse was that they could not get a hearing. Now, any experienced speaker can get as much disturbance in a meeting as he wants. He has only to get his audience into a bad temper. As MacDonald came to see that the meetings were going against him, he reverted to the idea of Mr. J. H. Thomas of getting votes out of sympathy for ill-treatment. There is no doubt that, in the latter part of the campaign, he deliberately welcomed interruption. He played for disorder; he was deliberately provocative and, especially in answering questions, abusive. The team of speakers sent down from headquarters helped to foment disturbance, not in Shinwell's meetings, but in MacDonald's. Shinwell met this by asking those Labour electors who attended MacDonald's meetings not to play into the hands of the enemy by interruption and disorder, but to give him a fair and courteous hearing.

There are a great many Co-operators in Seaham, and an answer given to a lady who questioned MacDonald during

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the 1931 election undoubtedly swung many votes to his side. The question was a very important one asked on behalf of the Co-operative Societies. In his reply, MacDonald gave a definite pledge. 'Not as long as I am a Member of the National Government,' he said, 'will it be the intention of the Government to tax Co-operative Societies.'

In spite of this pledge, the Government of which MacDonald was Prime Minister introduced a Bill which took £1,250,000 a year from the Co-operative Societies. Although the Cabinet knew that the Prime Minister's personal honour was impugned, they publicly humiliated him by compelling him to make a speech in the House of Commons in defence of the policy that he had solemnly denounced. There is no doubt that many Co-operators supported the Labour candidate in 1935 because they were convinced that MacDonald had let them down.

'Mean, shabby, dirty, despicable, and personal,' were some of the adjectives used by MacDonald when replying to a question at Wheatly Hill, Seaham, right in the middle of the campaign. He was asked whether he had anything to do with the appointment of his son to 'a big salaried job in the Government.' The question had reference to the fact that his son Malcolm had been promoted to the Cabinet and a salary of £5000 a year. It happened that, when MacDonald resigned the Premiership, his salary was reduced to £2000 a year, while, at the same time, his son, on being promoted Secretary of State for the Colonies, had his salary increased to £5000.

MacDonald reeled at the question as from a blow. He lost his head in an outburst of passion, and it was rage that dictated his answer. It was strange but significant that it should be Shinwell upon whom he vented his spleen, for the Labour candidate had had nothing to do with the putting of the question. But the answer was extraordinary in itself:

'My son,' he said, 'happened to have made a very considerable reputation in the House of Commons, and a certain person who is now in the constituency, finding that he was going to meet my son in debate at Oxford, thought it discreet to run away from it.'

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This statement was no answer, was quite irrelevant, and had no bearing upon the question. Shouts from the audience recalled MacDonald to the question, and he went on to declare that *half a dozen deputations* had come to him and begged him not to stand in the way of his son's advancement. There was a burst of ironical laughter at this, and voices shouted : ' Jobbe graft ! ' Then he lost his temper and became insulting.

' I know perfectly well,' he said sneeringly, ' that there are people mean and despicable and ignominious enough to laugh at that story. You can indulge yourselves in your own demonstrations of a blind malignity and meanness which I hope is not very widely scattered throughout the country for the sake of the honour of the country itself.'

Those who heard that answer believed that it was more contemptible than the reference to the alleged nepotism which had aroused it. MacDonald never recovered from it. It was the beginning of the end. So, from meeting to meeting, day to day, from speech to speech, his campaign became more hopeless. He had been unwilling at the beginning ; now he was apprehensive at the end. As he saw his foreboding failure being realized, he became more irritable and impatient. He made no attempt to meet the case put up by Shirrell. He ceased to defend the policy or record of the ' National Government. His earlier audiences were resentful and retorted ; his later audiences were contemptuous and laughed. He had come north to his first meeting with a speech, humorous and platitudinous, carefully prepared. He had tucked it early in the campaign. Interruption compelled him to come down from his high-sounding generalities to deal with the life and everyday problems of the Seaham folk.

MacDonald was quite unable to turn an interruption to his advantage. He could not, like Lloyd George, revel in interruptions. He had not the Welsh orator's twinkling and whimsical humour that, on the instant, can flash back a sparkling retort, to the complete discomfiture of a foolish interrupter. Nor had he the lightning readiness of Winston Churchill, who, on occasion, plays for interruptions, and he can counter-thrust with a scintillating riposte.

If MacDonald had had a ready wit and a sense of humour

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he might have contrived to circumvent opposition by apt repartee and so win through. Having neither of those gifts, his first reaction to antagonism was to become petulant. If the interruption was continued, he lost his head and descended to scurrility. Now, a north-country audience will not submit to this, and, exasperated, makes its protest in further interruption. Then MacDonald would realize that, after all, he had a speech to make, a speech that must win him votes—that is, if he was not to abandon the fight altogether. So he would change again, become penitential and wheedle.

Thus the contest which drew the most absorbing attention in the whole country came to an end. MacDonald's final meetings were remarkably quiet. His team of speakers and helpers, imported from the outside, was the largest ever seen at an election. He had more than two hundred cars on polling day. When he saw that defeat was inevitable, he went off to London, leaving Mr. Alister MacDonald and Miss Ishbel MacDonald to represent him at the counting of the votes.

The defeat of MacDonald was the most sensational of the election. He polled exactly half the votes he got in 1929. The figures in this 1935 fight were :

E. Shinwell (Lab.)	38,380
J. Ramsay MacDonald (Nat. Lab.)	17,882
Labour Majority	20,498

The previous figures had been :

1929. J. Ramsay MacDonald (Lab.)	35,615
Whittingstal (Con.)	6,821
Haslam (Lib.)	5,266
Pollitt (Com.)	1,431
Labour Majority	28,794

1931. J. Ramsay MacDonald (Nat. Lab.)	28,978
Coxon (Lab.)	23,027
Lumley (Com.)	677
National Labour Majority	5,951

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In London, MacDonald learned that his son, Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Dominions, had been defeated at Bassetlaw. Interviewed by the Press after the result had been declared, he bitterly complained of the 'filthy way in which the campaign had been conducted.

This crushing defeat of MacDonald, with the eyes of all the world watching, came as a thunderbolt. It was as decisive as it was sensational. Verily the miners of Seaham had spoken with no uncertain voice. So, too, had the electors at Bassetlaw. It may seem strange that, when the 'National' Government received such an overwhelming vote of confidence, the only two Ministers defeated were Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Lord President of the Council, and Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Dominions.

The reason why Baldwin won and MacDonald lost was because the people did not vote on a Party issue, but on a personal issue. The tremendous triumph of the election was a vindication of Baldwin's election strategy. By the adroit manoeuvre of calling a 'snap' election in the middle of a grave international crisis, by presenting the issue as one between War and Peace, the people were absolutely compelled to support a strong, 'safe' Government. They were not voting Tory, Liberal, or Labour; they were voting for a man—the man who had promised them Peace. Did not his friendly, honest features call to them from a thousand hoardings to trust him? And they did—then.

The issue at Seaham was also a personal one. There, too, the miners were asked to vote for a man, but the result showed that the man had been found out.

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## CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

### *THE UNIVERSITY BY-ELECTION*

**T**he defeat of MacDonald at Seaham was a blow to the 'National' Government and created a very difficult situation for the Prime Minister. It was necessary, if the 'National' Government was to maintain any pretence of an all-Party character, to find MacDonald another seat immediately. Although out of the House of Commons, he still retained his office of Lord President of the Council, but that could only be temporary, as it would be intolerable to have a person occupying such an important post without a seat in Parliament. Mr. Malcolm MacDonald continued, moreover, to receive his full salary as Secretary of State for the Colonies after he had been rejected by Bassetlaw.

It had been suggested at the time of the General Election that Mr. Skelton, one of the Members for the Scottish Universities, should be asked to stand aside in favour of MacDonald, who was then in great doubt as to his prospects at Seaham. The matter was set aside when, favourable reports having been received from Seaham, MacDonald determined to contest once more his old constituency. After his defeat at Seaham, the question of finding him a safe seat elsewhere was raised again in more urgent form. This was a matter of extreme difficulty owing to MacDonald's personal unpopularity. The death of Mr. Skelton, however, created a vacancy in the Scottish Universities, and immediately there was a great campaign of wire-pulling and intrigue to have MacDonald nominated as candidate in the by-election. As soon as this was known there was an outcry from all the University political associations against having MacDonald 'planted' on them. The Conservative Press, too, were loud in their protests. While admitting that it was essential, for political reasons, that MacDonald should get a seat, it was strongly urged that the seat should be one surrendered by one of the 'National'

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Labourists, several of whom had already offered to resign. It was contended by a very influential Tory newspaper that MacDonald was not a suitable candidate because the Universities should be represented by someone who had had a close connection with academic life.

‘Mr. MacDonald has been a propagandist, a fierce partisan and Party leader, and that is not the sort of person that should represent the academic life of the nation in the Houses of Parliament.’

A Press storm against MacDonald blew up at this time. Scottish newspapers had leading articles on the question and the correspondence columns were full of letters from indignant Tory voters, protesting against the ‘attempt to prostitute the constituency’ by foisting MacDonald upon it.

‘In our view,’ said a most important Glasgow newspaper in a leading article, ‘Mr. MacDonald is an unsuitable candidate in every respect, and it seems to us that the way in which he has been practically forced upon the Universities is deplorable. If Universities are to be a happy hunting-ground for politicians who cannot find seats elsewhere, the time will come when the Universities’ franchise will be abolished because it cannot be justified.’

Here is another quotation.

‘It is, indeed, fortunate that neither of the two Labour Governments over which he presided was able to end the existence of University seats ; otherwise there would be no haven of refuge for the man who was rejected by the workers of Seaham Harbour, whose chances of winning any other industrial seat in the land are nil, and who can only be sure of winning even the Scottish Universities’ seat provided that the Tory electors are prepared to rally to Mr. Baldwin’s call.’

What exposed the whole sordid business as a flagrant act of political jobbery was the fact that MacDonald had always been a violent opponent of the University franchise. He had even sponsored a Bill which demanded its abolition. When the Representation of the People (No. 2) Bill was before Parliament in 1931, MacDonald spoke very strongly against the



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Universities having special representation in Parliament. Speaking on a clause of the Bill which proposed the abolition of the University vote, MacDonald said :

‘ If you want materialism at its very worst, masquerading under the most sacred guise, you find it in the University for generations. At the present moment, the University representation is simply plural voting. . . . If we are going to adopt the Soviet system, do not do it in this way ; for it is the Soviet system. Hon. Members may shake their heads, but it is the Soviet system to abstract a profession of an institution and to say : “ You are going to have a constituency of your own.” Our view is that, if there be any special institution requiring representation here, it is certainly not the Universities. . . . We do not want to give the vote to those who become graduates and have to pay, I think, £1 for it.’

It soon became evident that, if the election was allowed to run its course in the ordinary way, MacDonald would be badly beaten. Most of the University political associations were opposed to MacDonald personally and to what was described as a piece of impudent gerrymandering. The candidature of one so discredited, showing as it did a cynical disregard of public opinion, was a risky adventure ; indeed, there was a strong likelihood of the Scottish Universities following the example of Seaham. This would not have suited the policy of the Prime Minister (Mr. Baldwin) at all. Something unusual and immediate had to be done. Mr. Baldwin himself intervened, promptly and effectively. He gave orders that the by-election had to be won. He placed the whole weight and strength of the Conservative organizations behind MacDonald. It was determined that the local organizations should undertake a canvass of their districts. Each local agent was given a list of all those in his district who were qualified to vote and was instructed to call upon them and to press upon them the urgency of voting for MacDonald and the National Government.

There were three candidates put forward—J. Ramsay MacDonald, the official ‘ National ’ Government candidate ; Dewar Gibb, the Scottish Nationalist candidate ; and Cleghorn

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Thomson, Labour candidate. Professor Gibb had been a candidate at the previous election. He had an optimistic faith in the cause of Scottish Nationalism, had no political and economic policy beyond that, and believed that self-government could be obtained by an *ad hoc* party.

David Cleghorn Thomson was the youngest of the three candidates - a 'lad o' pairts,' of great ability and outstanding achievement. He had had a brilliant career, had been Scottish Director of the B.B.C., was as keenly enthusiastic for Scotland as the Nationalist candidate, but believed that Scotland's economic and political betterment could be won by the policy of the Labour Party.

Two of the three candidates, Dewar Gibb and Cleghorn Thomson, might be fairly said to be genuine bona fide University candidates. They were graduates of Scottish Universities, with that foundation of culture and background of scholarship which would enable them to represent their fellow-graduates in the House of Commons. They were just that type of candidate that the University franchise was instituted to preserve. They were idealists, absolutely disinterested, inspired by a high purpose, full of enthusiasm for a cause and willing to make sacrifices to further it. MacDonald, on the other hand, was a realist whose one object was to re-enter the House of Commons, and without too nice a scrupulousness. The intrusion of MacDonald changed the character of the contest and lowered its status. The other candidates could claim to represent the distinctive ideology of the University electorate ; MacDonald stood as a politician and nothing else. He was a notable figure, a Cabinet Minister, but at the moment was merely a defeated politician using the University vacancy as the only means left to him of getting back to Parliament.

The electorate was composed of graduates of the Scottish Universities. The majority were of the middle class—doctors, teachers, ministers, etc. They were scattered all over the country. The voting is by post ; no public meetings are held ; the candidate, beyond sending out an election address, takes no further part in the contest. The campaign strategy of Tory headquarters was to see to it that every voter from John o' Groat's to Land's End be canvassed personally and urged to vote for MacDonald, the nominee of the Government.

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As there is no secret ballot in University contests, it is possible to ascertain how exactly each elector voted. This is rather important. Never since the University franchise was introduced had such extraordinary tactics been used as in this amazing by-election. The canvass was carried out carefully, thoroughly, and tactfully by experienced professionals.

Finally, leaving nothing to chance, Mr. Baldwin himself went up to Scotland and interviewed the heads of the Conservative associations, especially those who were hostile to MacDonald. He made a strong personal appeal to them to forget all else and work wholeheartedly for the return of MacDonald. This turned the tide of the election. In the end, the machine won. Indeed, it is questionable if many supported MacDonald either on personal grounds or from reasons of policy or principle. There were several other factors in this lamentable undemocratic by-election. The insistent attacks on MacDonald by Lady Houston may have won sympathy by their venomous extravagance. It is evident, too, that some voted for Professor Gibb, the Nationalist candidate, as they believed that he had a sporting chance of defeating MacDonald. There is no doubt, moreover, that some Tories voted Labour as a protest against the way the caucus had manœuvred the vacancy to secure the election of the Lord President of the Council.

This by-election will not readily be forgotten. It was a political farce. The election of MacDonald for the Scottish Universities presents a strong argument against the whole system of University representation. It must hasten the end of that system. The case for University representation rests mainly upon the fact that graduates can and will return people like Lord Hugh Cecil, Miss Eleanor Rathbone, and Mr. A. P. Herbert, who, while they belong to a particularly high standard and are excellent Parliamentarians, might be unfitted for the rough and tumble of the ordinary election contest.

If a University seat is manipulated to hoist into power a rejected Cabinet Minister, that case is killed and political decency is affronted. In becoming Member of Parliament for the Scottish Universities, MacDonald may have accomplished what he once professed himself eager to see—the destruction of University representation.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

### *MACDONALD AND PATRONAGE*

When, in 1924, MacDonald became Prime Minister, there was placed in his hands the most tremendous power that can come within the control of any citizen, with the exception of the King himself. Although the King is nominally the fountain of honour and although there is a funny little committee which is supposed to supervise the bestowal of honours, it is well known that the one voice that decides and dictates to whom honour shall be given is that of the Prime Minister. This was the power which he prized above all else—the great power of patronage.

Although MacDonald, in the eighteen years since he had entered Parliament, had learned something of the extent to which the Prime Minister can change a man's career and prospects, he had no idea, until he became Prime Minister himself, of its widespread ramifications. He found his relation to the great majority of his countrymen completely changed. He had been placed, as it were, upon a throne, and many were eager to pay homage to him for something that he alone could give—titles, honours, offices.

With regard to posts in the Government and most public offices, the power of the Prime Minister was supreme. By his control of the distribution of appointments, he was able to put a large number of men into positions, not only of authority, but often of affluence. Owing to the unquestionable authority of a Prime Minister, every Minister is dependent on him for his post. Appointed by the Prime Minister, he can be dismissed by him. In fact, he can hold his position only as long as it serves the Prime Minister's interest to retain him. How far the attitude of the individual Minister is subservient or otherwise largely depends on the character of the Minister. But MacDonald never for a moment allowed any Minister to forget this subordination. No Minister dare make an

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appointment without submitting his choice for MacDonald's approval. Indeed, at least one Minister did not make the choice at all. If the Prime Minister had not a particular favourite for a post, this Minister would submit a short list to MacDonald and allow him to make the selection.

As to the appointments in the gift of the Premier, the list is long, diverse, and curious. His power even intrudes into the sacred domain of religion. He has livings in his gift and can appoint a bishop or a rector. In the higher branches of education, the Prime Minister also holds sway. He can appoint a Professor of Divinity, of Surgery, of Hebrew, or what not. In the Law appointments also, it is in the power of the Prime Minister to exert considerable authority.

It is, however, with regard to honours and titles that the power of the Prime Minister had the most remarkable results and repercussions. Snobbery in England did not begin with George IV, nor did Thackeray's ridicule destroy it. The number of those whose ideas and conduct are prompted by a keen yearning for social distinction or by a vulgar admiration for wealth and class had not diminished in the eighty-five years that had passed since the *Book of Snobs* was written. The number of social climbers amazed even MacDonald.

From every class, except, of course, the actual working class, they came and paid homage to the Prime Minister in the hope of social preferment. A moderate estimate would be that ninety per cent of the wealthier classes would be prepared to make sacrifices, either of money or political allegiance or both, to obtain the social advancement which the patronage of the Premier could give.

The Prime Minister finds politicians, business men, newspaper proprietors, doctors, actors, artists, and preachers doing all sorts of things to attract his attention and win his favour. All who seek titles are not social snobs; the economic importance of an honour of any kind is indisputable. The doctor, actor, journalist, or artist who has a title is on a different plane from his undistinguished competitor. A business is not run on sentimental lines, and most concerns are eager to have a peer on their directorate or, if not, at least a baronet or a knight. It gives an air of dignity and respectability to a company prospectus.

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This regard for social distinctions is deep rooted in the class system and will persist as long as the social caste remains. Traced to its origin, it comes from the universal longing of man for approbation of his fellows, and ultimately for their admiration. We only admire what is different; by the acceptance of a title, a man is differentiated, and, in virtue of that gift, we approve him worthy of admiration. He is segregated. He joins the select company of the title-bearers, the aristocracy, the nobility, the peerage. In spite of the often unworthy methods by which a title is acquired, the holder is still regarded as on a higher plane.

To a Socialist who had become Prime Minister, the question of how to deal with this power of patronage was awkward. To the principle and the practice of patronage of any kind the Socialist is absolutely opposed. He would abolish the adventitious distinctions and differentiations which put men and women into an exclusive class, as they are incompatible with the very fundamentals of his faith. The system of society he seeks to establish is based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Its ultimate aim is a classless world with no more distinction between individual members of the State than there would be between members of a family. A Socialist society means an equal society, or it means nothing, and an equal society is one in which men and women are significant by reason of the services they render and not by reason of the titles they have acquired or the property they possess.

Robert Burns states the Socialist standard of values when he says :

*' The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a' that.'*

No one has put this general belief of the Socialist better than MacDonald himself. Writing of Keir Hardie, he said :

' When the great Labour Leader comes, whether he be born from the people or not will be of little concern, the decisive thing will be whether he values in his heart, as Burns did, the scenes and the people from which spring not only "Scotia's grandeur," but the power which is to purify society and expose the falseness and the vulgarity of materialist possession and class distinctions. The mind of

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the Labour Leader must be too rich to do homage to "tinsel show," too proud of its own lineage to make obeisance to false honour and too cultured to be misled by vulgar display.

*"A title, Dempster merits it ;  
A garter gie to Willie Pitt ;  
Gie wealth to some be-ledger'd cit.  
In cent, per cent.  
But give me real sterling wit,  
And I'm content."*

In the end, it is perhaps a matter of good taste and self-respect, and these are birthrights and are not taught in the schools. They belong to the influences which life assimilates, as plants assimilate a rich or an impoverished air and sap. Perhaps the Scotsman is peculiarly fortunate in this respect. No country has had a meaner aristocracy or a sturdier common people. Partly its education, partly its history, partly its church government and system of worship, partly the frugality which nature imposed upon it for so many generations, laid up a store of independence in the characters of many of its people, and Burns awoke this into activity. I doubt if any man who received the historical birthright of Scotsmen at his birth, ever accepted a tinsel honour without feeling that he was doing wrong and somehow abandoning his country.<sup>1</sup>

These sentiments were expressed by MacDonald in 1921, when he was not in a position to grant honours of any kind. He was not even in Parliament. A few years later, when he had the opportunity, all his high principles collapsed, and he maintained the vicious tradition of exploiting snobbery.

Trusted with a serious responsibility to the Crown, it is the paramount duty of the Prime Minister to see that the confidence reposed in him is not betrayed. The biographies of statesmen show how carefully, how unselfishly, many of them have discharged what was regarded as much a duty as a privilege. Lord Rosebery, who had himself been a Prime Minister, speaks of the high sense of honour that Peel displayed in this connection.

'The Prime Minister,' he says, 'is the guardian of the

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *J. Keir Hardie*, by William Stewart.

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honours of the Crown, and Peel discharged this duty with a fidelity, a wise caution, and a pervading sense of responsibility of which the very traditions have almost faded away.'

In the thirty years since those words were written, the high tradition has gone entirely. It may have been inevitable that it did not survive the changes, personal and political, of the War years. It did not die unwept and unhonoured, as from time to time since 1914 the question of honours has been debated both in the Lords and in the Commons. The last occasion was in July 1922, when there was a full-dress debate which was remarkable, not only for the scandal that was exposed, but for the policy which was revealed. Instance after instance was mentioned where honours had been granted wholesale, not for merit or service, but for a cash payment. Mr. Clynes, speaking for the Labour Party, denounced the traffic in honours and quoted Lord Carson, whom he referred to as a peer of great political distinction and legal eminence, as having said in the House of Lords :

'In the course of my business, I have examined long correspondence which showed that there was a regular brokerage in this matter of carrying out and obtaining honours.'

There was evidently, too, a regular tariff, varying in direct proportion to the altitude of the honour.

'One gentleman was given to understand that the price for a knighthood was £5000 with merit, but without merit double that or more. Baronetcies ranged in price from £20,000 to £40,000. Merit might reduce the price perhaps ; but for profiteers as a whole no "nonsense about merit" was permitted to interfere with trade. Peerages were naturally dearer. But the number offered was not on that account restricted, nor was there any censorious sifting of candidates willing to subscribe.'<sup>1</sup>

Keir Hardie, although a very poor man, refused an annuity which would have placed him in comparative affluence. He refused generous gifts, not from opponents, but from sup-

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Lloyd George : A Study*, by Sir Charles Mallet.



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porters—gifts offered for the purpose of preaching the gospel in which he believed. This, too, at a time when, as he says himself, he was ‘a man without a shilling’ and there was not then any payment of Members of Parliament. ‘I had made up my mind,’ he said, ‘to gang my ain gait without shackle or trammel of any sort or kind.’ Nothing is more characteristic of Keir Hardie than his steadfast determination to keep himself free of all entanglements that might in any way interfere with his personal and political independence. It is a pity that MacDonald did not, by a refusal to put himself under any obligation of this kind to anyone, follow Keir Hardie’s example.

The overthrow of the Labour Government and the formation of the ‘National’ Government had put MacDonald in a position such as no Prime Minister had held in the whole history of politics. He was a Prime Minister without a party of his own. He was in a position of complete dependence upon others. His Premiership depended absolutely upon Conservatives and Liberals. There is no doubt that, when, in August 1931, he discovered that hardly one Member of the Labour Party would support him on political grounds, he became very much alarmed.

His policy, therefore, had to be the creation of a new Party, to be called the ‘National’ Labour Party, pledged to his personal support. He set about this business with caution, tact, and wary circumspection. The first requisite of a political Party is a Party fund. *Point d’argent, point de Suisse*, which might be interpreted: ‘No money, no “National” Party.’ It is possible to have a Party without principles, but it is impossible to have a Party without money. In modern times, there are two methods of obtaining the necessary funds. The method of the Labour Party is to depend for its funds on the contributions of the rank and file, who are invariably very poor people making the sacrifice for the cause. It may fairly be said, on the other hand, that Conservative or Liberal working men do not, as a rule, make any contribution to the funds of their Party. The method of the Liberal and Tory organizations has been to depend, not on the coppers of the great mass of their supporters, but on gifts of wealthy men.

This method renders it inevitable that these gifts of money

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should establish a claim to some sort of recognition when honours are being distributed. When the traffic in honours was being debated in the House of Commons, the late Sir Austen Chamberlain, then Leader of the House, replying for the Government, admitted, justified, and indeed recommended the payment of money as a consideration in the bestowing of political honours. The essential point was, however, that the money paid over for this purpose was a donation to the Party fund, and not a gift to the Prime Minister. The Liberal and Conservative Parties do not publish any balance-sheet to reveal the sources of their funds. Therefore, the public are in ignorance as to what contribution to the funds followed or preceded the bestowal of the particular honour or title. Alone among political Parties, the Labour Party has no secret Party fund. All moneys received are accounted for in a balance-sheet, which is audited independently and is open to public inspection.

After funds come members. This was more difficult, but here, too, the power of patronage was effective. Unfortunately, most of those whom MacDonald wanted had already their affiliations with the Tory or Liberal Party. He could have got the promise of support from all of those, if they were to be allowed to remain in their respective Parties, but that was not what MacDonald wanted. He was anxious to build up a new Party, independent of the other three Parties, and he found it impossible to get recruits for it from Liberal and Conservative Members of Parliament. In return for titles or posts, they were willing to support MacDonald, but they could not be persuaded to earn the contemptuous laughter of their fellows by joining his ridiculous 'National' Labour Party. As it turned out, no Liberal or Tory in Parliament joined his new organization, but only a few renegades from the Labour Party.

The Prime Minister can recruit from outside Parliament if he uses patronage to that end. An experience I had in the spring of 1930 demonstrates this. I received a letter from a well-known London journalist, intimating that he wished to put forward the name of a friend, who was willing to join the Labour Party on condition that he was made a peer. His friend, he said, was in every way a desirable person, and, if

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granted a peerage, would be willing to work and vote with the Labour Party in the House of Lords. The name, for obvious reasons, was not mentioned in the letter. It came later under separate cover—just a name and no more. I was astonished to find that it was the name of a well-known Liberal, who had been a Member of Parliament for some years, and had since fought several by-elections as a Liberal. I have this letter and card in front of me now. Such is the frantic eagerness for honours that MacDonald could have filled the House of Lords with recruits from all Parties if he had dared to do so.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

### *THE LAST PHASE*

As the intention here is to describe the character of MacDonald the politician, it may not be possible to paint a portrait in colour ; still it may be possible to prevent dark tones resulting in a silhouette or over-emphasized lines resulting in a caricature. This may be a pleasant or unpleasant task in so far as the politics of the subject are in agreement with those of the writer. To a Socialist writing about the MacDonald of these later years, the task must necessarily be difficult—indeed, obnoxious—for he cannot pretend to be other than a critic.

In his introduction to the *Life of J. Keir Hardie*, MacDonald commends the author for writing frankly as a worshipper. He would infer that the only true portrait of any person is that of an admirer. This is absurd, for it rules out all criticism and censure, and without these no estimate is reliable. In the same introduction, which by the way is the most brilliant piece of literature MacDonald has ever written, he says :

‘ The glamour of the myth gathers round all great leaders, and becomes an atmosphere as real to their personality as the colour of cloud and sun is real to a landscape.’

As a myth is defined as a purely imaginary and fictitious person, narrative or object, it is doubtful whether or not MacDonald is cynical in this statement. There is no doubt that the glamour of the myth becomes an atmosphere to the hero, but it is often mischievous, demoralizing. It was known that, although MacDonald had no high opinion of Keir Hardie, nor had Keir Hardie of him, yet there was nothing mythical or fictitious about the great Labour leader. He was loved and admired for what he was, and the reputation which he had, and holds to-day, was based not on myths, but on fact. It

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was the genuineness, not the unreality, of his character that made Keir Hardie the idol of the working classes. Myth may have its purpose just as fiction has its purpose, but not in a delineation that claims to be accurate.

There was an unconscious element of humour in MacDonald's ingenuous commendation of myth in the portrayal of a great national figure, for no man has been more fortunate in the myths and legends that have grown around him. No picture of any man's character can be true which does not ruthlessly destroy all the myths and legends. The task may be unpleasant, but in the interests of accuracy and fidelity it cannot be avoided.

It can be said that no great public figure of modern times was so completely unknown as MacDonald, and this is due to the many legends that are bruited about concerning him. First of all, there is the legend of the great strong man, the man of action, of decision. The fictitious attribute is resolution—the real is indecision. Like Macbeth, as if some malign influence had emanated from Macbeth's castle, near which MacDonald was born, he was 'infirm of purpose' and failed because he could not screw his courage to the sticking point. He failed because of his fear of failure. It prevented his making up his mind. He dared not decide, in case he might decide wrongly. His fear-complex stirred his Celtic imagination to conjure up all kinds of morbid fancies. His analytical mind saw so many possibilities that were dangerous that he failed to find one that was safe. Indeed, in the end he would come to believe that nothing was safe.

The artist who mixes too many colours only makes mud. It is this that lay at the root of MacDonald's vacillation and hesitating instability. He hesitates and is lost. By nature a Conservative, he disliked change because of the risk that change involves. He never acted precipitately; he had always a hundred reasons for not acting at all. This obsession of failure drove him to seek to disarm opposition, to ingratiate himself with all whose power and influence he might fear. He was the incarnation of 'safety first,' of compromise—not all things to all men, but only if they were men of wealth, rank, or authority.

A person who is completely self-centred can have no deep

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convictions on questions of principle, unless these principles do not entail any sacrifice. That is to say, the person who looks on any question from the point of view of his own interest will not accept or support anything which is not likely to be successful. The decisions that such a person has to make are not governed by any moral obligation or sense of duty, but by mere expediency. The question he has to decide is as to which course of action will conduce most to his own benefit—to determine the balance of advantage. It is much easier to decide what is right, honourable and just, than to forecast what will be successful. One is a question of conscience, the other a matter of foresight. One is a moral judgment, the other an intellectual decision. Not being endowed with the gift of prophecy, MacDonald would hesitate before making a decision. Like Sir Boyle Roche's bird, he could be in two places at one time.

If this diagnosis is true, it must be justified by MacDonald's actions in those matters during his career when he had to make a big decision. During the War he was anti-war and pro-war. In 1924 he was anti-Russian and pro-Russian. In 1926 he was for the General Strike and against it. In 1931 he was pro-Labour and anti-Labour. From 1931 he declared that Socialism was the only remedy, while, at the same time, he was writing to the Tory candidates at by-elections condemning the Socialist candidate. It is not that he held opposing views consecutively, but that he proclaimed them simultaneously. He was that unpleasant phenomenon, a political hermaphrodite.

'Nothing is more simple than greatness,' says Emerson. 'Indeed, to be simple is to be great. Poets, philosophers, and even statesmen have, through the ages, praised simplicity.' It is said to be the one sign of breeding that vulgarity seldom assumes. MacDonald always claimed to be a man of simple tastes and homely habits. He would protest that his likings were for the quiet, sequestered ways of the unspoilt countryside, 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife.'

'I am,' he declared some years ago, 'one of those quiet sort of people ; one of those coral insects which build, build, and build, and nobody seems to know what they are building; but one day—lo and behold—the work that they have done

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comes up above water, and everyone knows, without talking, without boasting, without highfalutin' language, that the work has been done. That is what we have to do with the Labour Movement.'

Although MacDonald desired the reputation of enjoying the simple pleasures of life, of delighting in homely habits, nothing was further from his practice. In theory, he would enjoy the rural seclusion of a little village on the south coast ; in reality, he hurried from it to the crowded beach at Brighton to make a 'progress' along the promenade—the observed of all observers. He preferred tea in the public lounge of the largest fashionable hotel on the sea-front to a quiet meal at an unobtrusive inn. He used to take delight in a walk on the Terrace of the House of Commons on a summer afternoon, when that fashionable place was crowded and all eyes were for the Prime Minister.

Even his famous visits to Lossiemouth were widely advertised and stage-managed with an eye to maximum display. 'Every man,' wrote Johnson to Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'has a lurking wit to appear considerable in his native place.'

To the victor the spoils ; honour to whom honour is due. It may be fitting that the great statesman and world leader should have such a fuss made over him when he moves about, but why should he crave and eagerly accept such showy grandeur while pretending to despise it? Why should he foolishly boast that, though he has walked with kings, he has still contrived to keep the common touch.

The fact is that the habits of MacDonald were the complete antithesis of every definition of simplicity. His epicurean proclivities were only limited by his opportunities. The real MacDonald, in short, was much more of the Sybarite than the anchorite. While he wished to be regarded as a Draconic self-disciplinarian, his real inclinations were for the hero-worship of adoring crowds.

In a very shrewd and discriminating estimate of MacDonald which Lord D'Abernon wrote some years ago, he says :

'The artistic and cultural bias which J. Ramsay MacDonald took pleasure in proclaiming completed the disillusionment of those who had expected Labour to provide Ministers with rough and horny hands.'

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There is no doubt that Lord D'Abernon is right in saying that MacDonald took pleasure in proclaiming his artistic and cultural bias, but MacDonald did more than this; he proclaimed his artistic and cultural attainments.

There is that culture which is defined as the intellectual side of civilization. Then there is the hotly controverted reference of Matthew Arnold to culture as 'the best that has been known and said in the world.' This was never meant by Arnold as an adequate and comprehensive definition, as his *Culture and Anarchy* shows. If this were the only culture, then there have been many on the roll of fame, who, in spite of their natural refinements of mind and tastes, could not lay claim to it. But there is a natural culture which men like Robert Burns possessed and which MacDonald himself possessed in some measure, which is but remotely related to the scholarship that comes from formal intellectual training. 'The lad o' pairts tradition in Scotland, fostered by Sir James Barrie and the Kailyard School, dies hard. It sets education as supreme and especially the formal education of the universities. Thus we find that the young man, or, as in one of Barrie's plays, the old man, who endures the greatest privation that he may attain a knowledge of the classics is held up as a glorious example for all Scotsmen to follow. The proportion of the population in Scotland who follow this example is astonishingly high, and those who would like to, but cannot, follow, have usually a reverential admiration for those who do. They are apt to exaggerate the cultural value of this kind of education and to depreciate the importance of other and less formal types.

It was MacDonald's misfortune that, owing to his poverty, he never had the opportunity to continue his education in a university. His education at the Lossiemouth school served as the best groundwork, the foundations on which a real culture might have been based by further study. But the fact was that he had to become a worker at an age when boys of the class from which statesmen had been previously recruited were just beginning their public school and university career. It is, therefore, no disparagement of MacDonald to say that he did not possess the formal culture of the schools; he had been gifted with other qualities in lavish compensation,



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Even if MacDonald had, in the whole of his public life, the leisure necessary to acquire the scholarship of a man of culture, he had not the temperament to gain anything but the superficial fripperies. His disposition was too restless, too nervously excitable and too anxious. He lacked the patience and concentration of the student.

There is a general impression that MacDonald was outstanding in culture among his colleagues in the Cabinet. Nothing is further from the truth. In the Labour Cabinet of 1929-31 it is certain that he would not come into the first dozen, if the names were put in order of culture and scholarship. In the 'National' Government there was no criterion of culture that would put MacDonald anywhere but among the last three. Indeed, it is not a certainty that he could claim a culture higher than any, except, of course, Mr. J. H. Thomas, who is in a class by himself.

It was a saying among the Greeks that in every man there are four men. There is the man the world sees, the man his friends see, the man as he sees himself, and the man whom the gods see. The last is, of course, the real, authentic man. Any other estimate must be incomplete. Doubtless there might be not four, but forty.

The only valid judgment of a man is that of the historian of the future who, uninfluenced by the environment of place and time and people, can form a clear and just appreciation of his character and status. But men cannot wait. An estimate is wanted now. The evidence of facts, influences and forces upon which the historian of the future will have to rely is being supplied now. With the evidence here available, it is possible to form a discriminating judgment, which, necessarily not final, can, at any rate, be fair.

What, then, does the world think of MacDonald? Of no other prominent personality would that question be more difficult to answer. It may truly be said that the reputation of no outstanding figure in recent years has undergone so great or so many changes as that of Ramsay MacDonald. To world opinion MacDonald was at one time unknown, but in Britain his rapid rise to fame was broken by the War. Then he slipped back in public favour, only to recover dramatically in 1922. From that date, when he became Leader of the Opposition, he

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rose steadily in public esteem until 1924, when he first came definitely into world politics. At the end of his first Premiership in 1924, his reputation had a setback. Patiently, eagerly and skilfully, he set to work to rehabilitate himself, with such success that, in 1929, he became Prime Minister once more.

As far as his reputation in the country was concerned, MacDonald reached the topmost pinnacle when he became head of the 'National' Government in 1931. At the World Economic Conference, when he spoke to the assembled nations, he became, for the moment, a world figure, the centre of attention, admiration, and authority. Since then his decline in public esteem has been as steady abroad as it has been rapid at home.

Difficult as it is to estimate the world's opinion of MacDonald, it is as difficult to get a life-like portrait of him as seen by his friends. If Johnson's definition of a friend as 'one joined to another in mutual benevolence or intimacy' is correct, then, in truth, MacDonald had few friends. He had never, boy or man, had a chum. There have been few who were free of his house. It is difficult to think of any man looking on him with affection; it is impossible to think of him holding that affection long. He has had associates, but never on terms of regard and mutual trust.

A procession of people has passed through his life, but the period of their association with him invariably has been in direct proportion to his need of them. Even those who should have been his closest colleagues, his Ministers and even Members of the Cabinet, were kept at a distance. Those who sought his friendship, and they were many, obviously did so in the hope of his patronage. Many who did homage to him when he was Prime Minister had been bought by benefits and were retained by the prospects of more.

Most Premiers are aloof, but no Prime Minister, no leader of any Party has ever been so aloof as MacDonald. He was more than aloof; he was inaccessible. Aloofness is a charge brought against most Ministers. MacDonald realized the importance of it as a policy. The leader should be a man apart. Familiarity cheapens, in the eyes of the mob, the heaven ordained for one.

The only Prime Minister of recent times whose head was

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not turned by high office was Lloyd George. Anyone could approach him and would always get a smiling, good-natured reception. To see Baldwin go stamping through the Lobby on his way to or from his room looking straight in front, a fixed stare, solemn and unsmiling, so that it was not necessary to recognize anyone, was to realize how much Baldwin's natural friendliness had been modified in the interests of the traditional aloofness of a Prime Minister.

MacDonald had all the stately dignity, the Persian grace of the Victorian diplomatist. He had the brow of Apollo, a finely modelled head, with great width across the cheek-bones. A face of well-defined features, and he carried himself with an air of authority. Certainly, this Labour Leader, who would don the mantle of Canning and Castlereagh, Palmerston and Salisbury, Granville and Gladstone, did no discredit to these immortals in dignity and distinction. Indeed, he may be said to have been more distinguished than any predecessor since Gladstone.

His eyes were the worst feature of his face. They had a cold, hard look about them. Writing of pictures and photographs of MacDonald an author has compared him to 'a tiger in his strength, his fierce driving and holding energy. In his lightning fierceness, he has the endless patience of the jungle king, a patience that can hide everything but its own unsleeping purpose.'<sup>1</sup>

No one who knew MacDonald's chronic hesitancy and his petulance would speak of his driving force or endless patience, but the comparison may be just in one particular. In the association of beauty with callousness may lie that 'fearful symmetry' of which the poet speaks. Epstein, the master genius, has caught this hard and sinister heartlessness of MacDonald in a bust which is a revelation of stark realism.

Psychologists say that the first years of life are the most important in the determination of character. During those sensitive years, impressions are made that may remain and deepen right through life. Reference has already been made to the peculiar circumstances of MacDonald's infancy and to the evidences in his life and character of the psychological reactions to his heredity and environment. The spoilt child

<sup>1</sup> *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, by Mary Agnes Hamilton.

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of doting women is well known to psychologists as developing a peculiar personality. The fond mother adores her boy, but wishes him to remain a child. She would never have him grow up, lest she might lose him. In MacDonald's case, the mother has had her wish; in the emotional sense he never grew up. His emotions ruled his life, and they were the emotions of a child.

The hero-worship of the multitude who listened spellbound to his speeches in later life only completed the demoralization which the hero-worship of his childhood began. The petted boy grows up. He is softened, sensitive, temperamental, vulnerable. The first result is that MacDonald became not only selfish, but self-centred. His selfishness lay at the base of his ambition and led to suspicions, jealousies, hatreds, and ingratitude. It affected his whole life, as the dyer's hand is stained to the tint he works in.

Selfish people fear lest the good thing that they desire for themselves shall be diverted to another. Jealousy is but a form of suspicion. MacDonald was forever imagining hidden motives and secret intrigues. His colleagues in the Cabinet, Labour Members of Parliament, and the members of the Labour Party have all, from time to time, been suspected of conspiring against him. This apprehensive jealousy of possible rivals distorted his judgment of others and coloured his appreciation. Thus he found it difficult to praise spontaneously and never generously—a damnable failing in a leader. On the other hand, he had a strange propensity for depreciation. When some expression of approbation is inevitable, he would 'damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer and, without sneering, others teach to sneer.'

MacDonald trusted nobody and was never completely trusted himself. His inborn suspicions led him to give ear to the flimsiest gossip. He had a feminine avidity for scandal, and, with characteristic disloyalty, would listen to any aspersion or disparagement of his Ministers and colleagues.

Professor Laski, in a character study of great brilliance, has written :

'MacDonald cannot bear any rivals near the throne. His jealousy is easily aroused, and he can become almost feminine in his sensitiveness. He feels criticism acutely, and

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he has a curious power of retaining the memory of attack long after its consequences have completely disappeared.'

His envy was often excited even when there did not seem the least possibility of rivalry. It would be difficult to identify any who have risen to any prominence near him who did not, at some time or other, excite his jealousy or suspicion. Keir Hardie, Henderson, Snowden, Webb, Lloyd George, and many others have all in turn come under his jealous suspicion.

'MacDonald,' says Professor Laski, 'showed a curious inability to accept with grace or pleasure the revelation that, so far from justifying his fears, Mr. Henderson had proved himself the most distinguished Foreign Secretary of modern British history.'

Self-love with MacDonald was a psychological neurasthenia. The fear that sprang from it followed his footsteps like a haunting spectre. Its shadow fell on his cradle in the cottage at Lossiemouth, and the ghost stood behind the Premier's chair at Whitehall. His fear of ill-health was constant from his childhood, and at times tended to make him hypochondriac. His fear of want, of insecurity, was the first spur to his ambition and arose from the poverty of his youth.

Self-love and self-pity ruled out any thought for others, any generous instinct. MacDonald had a hard, cold, and callous nature. His inordinate egoism and the want of consideration for others that derived from it appeared in his treatment of those whom he met every day—secretaries private, personal, and parliamentary. He invariably preserved the stiff attitude of the official. He was never cordial and never relaxed for a moment the starchy hauteur of the man in authority. He treated those of his secretaries who were civil servants merely as functionaries—never as human beings. He knew nothing and cared nothing about them, except in their capacity as servants.

So, too, in his treatment of those who were looked upon as his friends. The service on his behalf of men like Lord Arnold, Sir Oswald Mosley, Sir William Jowitt, was received by MacDonald as if it were a duty and not a sacrifice in his interests, and in a way that showed neither appreciation nor thankfulness.

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Many a poor man, in the dark days when MacDonald was in disgrace, welcomed him to his fireside and gave him of his best—often at considerable cost to himself. When MacDonald came to be in a position to help them or make some recompense, he would not give them a thought. Not that they sought it. The people who came fawning on MacDonald after he had become Prime Minister belonged to a different class.

Nor had he any feelings of personal loyalty, and his whole life has been marked out by intrigues and quarrels, from his intrigue with the Liberals in 1909 to his intrigue with the Tories in 1931, and from his quarrel with Keir Hardie in 1909 to his break with Henderson in 1931. Lord Snowden, in his *Autobiography*, tells of how, in 1910, MacDonald asked him to enter into an intrigue with the object of making him (MacDonald) Chairman of the Labour Party, and how he refused.

MacDonald's attitude to the rank and file of the Labour Party when he met them individually was deplorable. No Prime Minister of recent times has been so aloof from his supporters. Admission to his presence was closely guarded; it would have been easier to storm the gates of paradise. To any of the rank and file who did succeed in gaining admittance, his demeanour was that of an imperious potentate, condescending for a moment to recognize the existence of one of the common herd. The attitude of some Labour Members towards the Prime Minister, on the other hand, was the meek humility of a new boy to the headmaster. That is, they regarded him with awe, and with admiration. This relationship changed rapidly, however, after 1929, when the process of disillusionment began.

It is a well-recognized trait of those who are emotionally unbalanced that their self-love, their egocentricity, leads them by way of auto-suggestion to regard themselves as superior to all others. Vanity is merely the evidence of their abnormal desire to be admired. Who is more admired than the great national figures? These egoists, therefore, regard themselves as fashioned in the heroic mould. MacDonald's vanity complex was such that could never imagine himself on the stage of life in any but the star rôle. Of course, a sense of humour would have saved him from this ridiculous deception, but that saving grace was one of MacDonald's most astonishing deficiencies.

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His idolization of self has been already referred to in his habit of dramatizing himself in the person of some great historical character. Not only on great occasions, but in small, is this peculiar propensity apparent and, too, at the most unexpected times. Disraeli goes to the opera at the crucial point of international negotiations. MacDonald hastened to broadcast from Covent Garden Opera House his opening speech in the election campaign of 1931. As Wellington went to the Duchess of Richmond's ball in Brussels on the eve of Waterloo, while the guns of Napoleon could be heard louder and louder between the dances, so MacDonald went to the cinema in the height of the crisis, when the Empire was crashing to ruin. He went to a cinema to see a French comedy film. He went, although he seldom went to theatre, concert hall, or cinema. He went, although he did not like films. He went, although he didn't appreciate humour, and he went, although he did not understand French. Yet his going there was characteristic. It was a gesture meant to reassure the British people, who were, at that time, woefully unaware of any need for reassurance.

All emotional people are easily wounded, touchy, and ready to take offence. This is merely the converse to their desire for admiration. That MacDonald was in his emotional infancy is seen by his childish cagerness to show off. He delighted in dressing up. He looked handsome and distinguished, both in evening dress and in the gaudy garments of a Court function. He fully appreciated this, and in the number of times he was photographed he rivalled a Hollywood star. One London Press photographer boasts that he got the Prime Minister to pose for him thirty times on one Sunday at Lossiemouth.

How did MacDonald see himself, or, better still, how did he like the world to see him? There is no legend of MacDonald so widespread or so much believed in as that of the toil-worn Atlas, bent down with the burden of the world. The story, entirely the invention of MacDonald himself, is that, from morning, very early morning, until next morning, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen hours on every day of the week, he worked on assiduously, indefatigably. Sundays and Saturdays, seven days in every week, without holidays and without leisure, the weary Titan slaves on.

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Nobody expects a Prime Minister to be chained to his task without remission. A Prime Minister needs an occasional holiday as much as other men, and MacDonald took it more than most. To the historic house of the Premiers of England, No. 10 Downing Street, came not only the great ones of this country, but celebrities from the ends of the earth. All his life MacDonald had sought to be associated with people of fame and high rank. When Prime Minister, he was in a position to demand their attention and often, indeed, their deference.

While former Prime Ministers spent most of their time, when not required in the House of Commons, consulting Ministers and officials, MacDonald had a diversion that took up the greater part of each day. This was his favourite pastime of holding Court. Men whose names were on every lip would seek audience with him as with a reigning monarch and await his convenience in an ante-chamber. At his room in the House of Commons, behind the Speaker's Chair, homage was paid to Britain's Prime Minister by the high and mighty. Thus from morning till night on most days he spent his time in what was to him the most delightful of all companions, listening luxuriously to the 'tinsel clink of compliment.' In a surfeit of sycophancy, the most precious hours of the day were passed. The evening, too, was often spent in the rôle of society lion in the *salons* of Mayfair.

It is the duty, as it should be the policy, of a Prime Minister to spend as much time in the Commons as possible. Mr. Lloyd George, when bearing an intolerable burden during the most awful years of the War, even at times of terrifying anxiety, allowed himself no relaxation, but was always at hand in Downing Street or the House of Commons, always available to tackle any situation that might arise. During that time his attendance in the Chamber itself was extraordinary, having regard to the weight of his responsibilities.

Mr. Bonar Law, when Prime Minister, had neither the time nor the inclination for social festivities. Between 1924 and 1929, Mr. Baldwin spent an astonishing part of his time in the House of Commons. Hour after hour he would sit on the Treasury Bench during the dreariest debates, keenly alert, lending an importance to the debate by his presence, his interest and his



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air of genial benignity. Yet he was able to discharge his duties without the complaint of overwork, in which MacDonald constantly indulged.

MacDonald was never present in the Commons if he could avoid it. Whilst other Ministers had to answer questions at any time during question hour, he would not put in an appearance until question 45, and then, except on a Thursday, he would hasten off. Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Chamberlain, and many Labour Ministers have often sat through an all-night sitting; MacDonald would not do so.

In the House of Commons the unexpected is always happening; now and again there arises a situation when the Prime Minister's presence is called for in the House. Often MacDonald could not be found; he had gone off without giving even a telephonic address.

The pose of the weary Atlas became a parliamentary joke. Mr. Andrew McLaren, the artist Labour Member, used to impersonate MacDonald. He would appear at the door of the Members' tea room and strike a pose immediately recognizable. His whole body would droop, his head would fall forward, his arms hang listless. Then he would heave a sepulchral sigh and pass his hand over his brow. In a voice of the utmost weariness, he would say: 'Ah! my friends, I am so very tired.' It was MacDonald to the life, and the hilarious laughter that followed showed how clever had been the mimicry.

Nothing was more characteristic of MacDonald than his desire to have an impressive retinue. That entourage performed two functions, and it would be difficult to estimate which was the more important. Human service is one of the greatest luxuries, and a large suite gives an air of distinction. Then this large staff took much of the work off his hands and gave him greater leisure. Other Prime Ministers have managed with only a few secretaries. Gladstone had three. Even during the War the Prime Minister had not more than six. MacDonald had ten. As this may hardly be believed, it is necessary to enumerate them. MacDonald's personal staff consisted of one principal private secretary; one second private secretary; three other private secretaries; two personal private secretaries; one press and publicity secretary; and two parliamentary private secretaries.

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The House of Commons sits for five days a week, but MacDonald used to rush off to Chequers on a Friday forenoon. Friday is usually a Private Members' Day; no matter how important the question debated, MacDonald would not postpone his Chequers visit to attend the House. Not only so, but special arrangements had to be made to deal with urgent matters which required his personal attention.

It was not without warning of the dangers that MacDonald decided to spend so much time at Chequers. Lord Haldane foresaw the demoralizing effect which the possession of Chequers, the great mansion house in the country, would have upon a Prime Minister who belonged to the working class and was not accustomed to such grandeur. He declared that it would tempt him to spend so much time lording it in the grand manner that he would be apt to neglect his very important duties. When Lord Haldane uttered that warning, he had MacDonald in mind; what he feared came to pass.

On 25 March 1934 a well-known London political journalist, writing in the *Sunday Express*, pointed out that the formation of the 'National' Government had greatly increased MacDonald's leisure, and that the appointment of Mr. Stanley Baldwin as Lord President of the Council and deputy-Premier with, like MacDonald, no departmental duties, lightened considerably the duties of the Prime Minister. This writer revealed a fact long known, but never made public before, that MacDonald was not an over-burdened slave to duty. The heading ran: 'The Premier has really an Easy Time,' and the conclusion was that the real facts proved that no Prime Minister for a quarter of a century has had as easy a run as MacDonald.

Few Prime Ministers have recognized the importance of publicity more than MacDonald, and certainly none have been as solicitous as he to get the advertisement of the Press. So eager indeed was he to get all the advertisement that the Press could give him that he appointed an extra official with the sole duty of boosting the Prime Minister. Paragraphs concerned with the Prime Minister's movements have a double purpose. They count as material for the journalist and as publicity for the Premier. The public is always eager to learn of the movements of its notables.

It can readily be understood that a Prime Minister might

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wish on occasion to escape the glare of publicity that surrounds him and spend his leisure without his whereabouts being publicly broadcast. Occasionally, MacDonald informed the journalists of his intentions, and they were both discriminate and discreet in their use of the information which he supplied. There is no excuse for a Prime Minister endeavouring to mislead the Press and thus get statements published which were untrue. Yet again and again he was guilty of a breach of faith in that connection. For example, in his desire to advertise his sleepless attention to duty, on Friday, 14 December 1931, MacDonald informed the Press that he was so overwhelmed with Government business that he could not go to Chequers as usual for the week-end, but must remain in London chained to his desk. The Press discovered later that MacDonald did not wish them to discover his whereabouts during that week-end, and the information which he had spontaneously given them was absolutely incorrect. The indignant public rebuke to him for the attempted deception which was published afterwards had a salutary, if temporary, effect. Nothing can be more aggravating to an Editor than to be tricked in this way and to find that the sedulous drudge of Downing Street was, in fact, gallivanting at a house-party in the country or, as on one occasion, following the hunt on foot—a Malvolio in green galligaskins.

MacDonald's life since 1931 was a succession of disappointments. When he severed his connection with men whom he had known and worked with for thirty years, he did so without any real regret. He knew he was cutting himself adrift from his Labour colleagues and associates. He did not mind that very much. Apart from Thomas he had no intimate friends in the Labour movement. His closest associates were outside the Party. But it is certain that for all his intuitive insight MacDonald did not fully foresee the consequences which would result from the setting up of the 'National' Government. Nor could he predict how far he would be compelled to renounce the ideals of a lifetime.

As Leader of the Opposition and as Socialist Prime Minister he had been lionized in some of the Tory drawing-rooms of Mayfair. He was popular with many of his political opponents. But he did not appreciate how empty that adulation was or

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how short lived it was going to be. It was indeed a capture to have the leader of the Socialists dining at the mansion of a Tory hostess. It was a very different thing when MacDonald was merely one of themselves. No longer either a Socialist or a Premier he was absolutely *de trop*.

A Premier is surrounded by a swarm of self-seeking sycophants, flatterers, and 'yes-men.' When he leaves the Premiership they buzz around his successor. After MacDonald lost the Premiership, he found himself in a changed atmosphere. It was the treatment he received from the Tory side of the House that hurt him most. He was slighted and rejected. Gratitude is rare in politics and it is certain that MacDonald did not receive from his Tory colleagues any acknowledgment of the debt they owed to him. They overlooked the fact that if MacDonald had not set up the 'National' Government, many of them would not have reached the House of Commons. Even Baldwin himself was not blameless. Not only did he edge MacDonald out of the Premiership but he allowed him to suffer many humiliations from which he could have protected him.

A case in point was the treatment meted out to MacDonald when the Co-operative Tax was imposed. Then there was the delay and reluctance in providing MacDonald with a seat after his defeat at Seaham, a fact which was not compatible with their declaration four years before, that he was the man who saved the country. Again there was the incident when MacDonald, a life-long pacifist, was forced to put 'J.R.M.' to the White Paper on Rearmament. It is true that Baldwin afterwards declared in a public speech that MacDonald had not been given the credit that was his due, but the protest came too late.

It was a sad sight to see MacDonald after he had retired from the Government, sitting aloof on a back bench, completely ignored. A lonely man, he seemed worried, anxious and very tired. Disowned by Labour, slighted by Tories, discarded by the Government, he gradually faded out.

There is no doubt that this treatment, and the realization of what lay behind it, preyed upon his mind. The physical reaction to his mental suffering was a breakdown in health. Always extremely sensitive, it broke his heart. The iron

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entered into his soul. MacDonald, to use a word the full significance of which a Celt would appreciate, was *fey*.

No wonder he wanted to get away. Deep in the heart of every Celt there is the call of the sea. And always the call is to the West. The Viking ships carried their warrior chiefs westward to Valhalla in the sunset. Ever and anon, MacDonald, born by the sea coast, had heard that call and, when he could, obeyed it. There is an ancient legend told even yet in the Clachans of the Highlands, a tale that MacDonald had often heard as a boy from his grandmother, of a land that lies to the west, away towards the sunset, where happiness comes to all. It is the Valhalla of the Celt. It is known as *Tìr Nan Og*—the Land of the Ever Young. Seeking such a land of happiness and rest, death overtook him.

The great ones of the world did him honour at his obsequies. An impressive service was held at Westminster Abbey. With the Prime Minister and two former Premiers among the pall bearers, with the King's brother in attendance, with the head of the Church and the Speaker of the House of Commons to do him honour, Ramsay MacDonald received the homage of the nation.

But it was the House of Commons that was the focal point of MacDonald's career. There is no forum to compare with it. It is a sounding board from which voices travel round the world. It was here that MacDonald rose to his highest heights. This great place too, witnessed his slow fading out.

In the House of Commons the clash of controversy is fierce and the cut and thrust of debate keen, but when political issues are laid aside, when the combatants leave the arena of party strife and when personal issues emerge, there is no place where there is greater friendliness, generosity, and good feeling.

Such an occasion was Tuesday, 10 November 1937, when Mr. Speaker rose to inform the House of the death of the Rt. Hon. James Ramsay MacDonald. The House, always sensitive, gathered strained and nervous. Members were shocked and saddened by the sudden and unexpected death of one who had played so great and memorable a part in its life for more than a generation.

The tribute paid by the Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, was couched in generous terms. In referring delicately and tactfully to the events of 1931, he said :

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‘ Nevertheless I do not propose now to dwell upon that phase, for the obvious reason that Mr. MacDonald’s action in 1931 aroused controversies the bitterness of which has not yet died away, and this afternoon we shall not desire to dwell upon controversies, but rather upon things on which we can all agree.’

After recalling his own association with the ex-Premier, and referring to his great natural gifts the Premier said :

‘ Another characteristic which strongly impressed me was his ability to handle an international gathering, an ability which was all the more remarkable because he spoke no other language than his own, and as far as I know, he understood very little of any other tongue. I suppose it could be said with truth that no British statesman of his time had a wider personal knowledge of international figures than Mr. MacDonald. For myself, as a colleague of Mr. MacDonald, I never received anything but kindness and consideration from him.

‘ His end was one which any of us might envy. Just before he sailed Mr. MacDonald told a reporter that he was going “ to seek the most elusive of all forms of happiness—rest.” Mr. Speaker, he has found what he went out to seek, and there, perhaps, we may leave him.’

Mr. Attlee, the Leader of the Opposition, who had once been Parliamentary Private Secretary to MacDonald, and who was one of the ex-Premier’s doughtiest but most courteous antagonists, paid a tribute of great eloquence and distinction. He said :

‘ This House has sustained a great loss in the death of one of its most distinguished Members. He was a great parliamentary figure who had been for the greater part of thirty years prominent in our debates, a man who held for more than seven years the high office of the first Minister of the Crown. Mr. MacDonald has been given only a little more than two years of comparative rest since he laid down the burden of the Premiership. He had, so to speak, hardly left the battlefield. It is never very easy, while the controversies in which a man has been engaged are still live issues,

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to judge fairly either his actions or his character. Strong feelings obscure the judgment ; the mists of battle prevent clear vision. This is so especially when there has been a parting of the ways between old associates. The events of the last six years are too near to us to allow a right perspective. The actions of Mr. MacDonald in the year 1931, and afterwards, made a breach between him and Members on this side too deep to be closed. Personal relations of long standing were broken, never to be renewed. Our opinion on these events must necessarily differ from that of hon. Members on the other side, and they must inevitably affect our judgment of the man and the course of his life in the last six years. We can only leave those things to the historians in the future and to their judgment, which may well depend upon the course of history in this country and the world.

‘For myself, I will follow the example of the Prime Minister in abstaining from any attempt to deal with those years or to assess Mr. MacDonald in those years. I would not like to say anything which might give a wound on this occasion. I would not like to fail in generosity to the dead or in justice to the living. I would rather turn to the earlier and happier days. Mr. MacDonald started life without any advantages of wealth, influence, or position. He had to make his way and earn his living in a hard world. He had to gain a wide education for himself at the same time, and it was due to his determination and his own qualities that he was able to rise to so high a position and to accomplish so much. For nearly forty years he was one of the chief advocates of the cause of Socialism in this country and he was for many years one of the leading members of the Independent Labour Party. He was one of the three or four men most responsible for the creation and development of the Labour Party. With his striking personality, great powers of oratory, and effective literary style, he spread the gospel of Socialism at a time when its adherents were few and weak, and their opponents strong and, apparently, impregably entrenched. He added to those other qualities a gift for organization and political strategy. For many years he spent himself freely, working at intense pressure. . . .

‘Perhaps it is some little achievement that, in 1924, when

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bearing the double burden of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, he sought to bring appeasement to a distracted world. He will always be remembered for his services on behalf of the workers. On these benches we shall always like to think of him as he was in the fullness of his powers, fighting against odds in the cause in which he believed.

Sir Archibald Sinclair, the leader of the Liberal Party, who had served in the ex-Premier's first Cabinet of the 'National' Government, speaking with whole-hearted appreciation, said :

'For two long periods in the last twenty years of his public life, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was the centre of fierce controversy and the object of ruthless criticism. The merits of those controversies will be judged by posterity, and they do not to-day concern us. Let us now remember only this : that in his public life Mr. Ramsay MacDonald bore himself with dignity, with generosity and understanding towards those who differed from him, and with proud and indomitable courage, which was the more admirable in a man who was by nature so finely sensitive.

'He was a great Scotsman who rose by qualities of mind and force of character to high estate, but who remained rooted in the soil of his native parish, in his home in Moray, and in the love of his devoted family, to whom our sympathy flows out this day.'

When these felicitous words were spoken there was an eloquent silence. All three speakers had referred to the controversies that had ranged round the ex-Premier, but all could say with complete sincerity that, on that November afternoon, those controversies were forgotten. Instead a tide of emotion seemed to sweep across the House, a surge of forbearance and sympathy.

When the Speaker had formally put the motion for the adjournment, Members still sat motionless in their seats, seemingly loth to break the spell. They seemed to feel that it was the end of an epoch. When at last slowly and sadly they rose from their seats, they were met with the traditional call that nightly echoes through the corridors of Westminster,



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but which that afternoon seemed to carry a peculiar significance. Hearing it, they might well imagine that he, whom they had gathered to honour, was pronouncing, in his deep-toned voice, his own name in answer to the time-honoured cry : ‘ Who goes home ? ’

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There can be no doubt that the historian of the future, reviewing with impartial eyes the events of the post-war years, will inevitably come to the conclusion that the setting up of the 'National' Government by MacDonald was the greatest disaster that has befallen this country, and indeed the world, since the War. It is comparable in its course and consequences with the setting up of the Nazi regime in Germany, for which this Government, too, must bear a major responsibility. Every moment of its continuance as the Government is fraught with danger, not only to this country, but to the world.

Its beginning was characteristic of its career, for it began with an act of political apostasy unparalleled in British history—an act which marked the beginning of a seven-year period from the Dark Ages, in a crescendo of calamity.

The development of democracy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been based on the right of the people to choose their own Government. The fight for political, and especially economic, freedom was being won. The people were coming into their own. In 1931, with a Labour Government in office, although in the midst of the greatest depression the world has ever known, the standard of life of the great mass of the people was higher than it had been since the War. Conservatism had been badly defeated. Its mainstay, the financial interests, was being attacked. MacDonald's betrayal saved Conservatism. He enthroned it again. He embellished it with a majority of 200 in the House of Commons.

Since the advent of the 'National' Government the foundations of democracy have been attacked and Britain's historic freedom has been undermined.

At a luncheon held by the 'National' Labour Party in October 1934, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Baldwin, and Sir John Simon boasted that the 'National' Government represented the same principle of national concentration and was performing

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the same task for this country in the world crisis as the Fascist dictatorships were doing for Germany and Italy.

General Temperley, one of the chief British representatives at Geneva for ten years and head of the War Office Delegation, tells of the part played by the 'National' Government in discrediting the League. He has told how the Government rejected the moderate proposals of Brüning and thus helped to create the conditions that led to the rise of Hitler. He tells how Britain rejected the American proposals for disarmament while Mussolini accepted them, and that if it had not been for the 'National' Government, acting through Sir John Simon, Japan would have been stopped in her Manchurian adventure. On 22 April 1932, when MacDonald was at Geneva, what General Temperley describes as a golden opportunity was missed of getting an agreement between France and Germany which would have meant peace in Western Europe for a generation.

The progress of civilization in the twentieth century has been slowly and steadily in the direction of freedom and democracy. If we follow the Continental custom and divide the political world into Right and Left, it is obvious that the trend of public opinion is definitely towards the Left. The extension of the franchise has given political power to the working classes. Hence we find more and more leaders drawn from the working class. To-day the map of Europe is dotted with working-class leaders. Indeed, it would be difficult to find in Europe a notable President, Premier, or statesman who has not come from artisan or peasant stock. Their poverty was not a hindrance to their rise ; it was an incentive.

The world is going Left. Already Russia, France, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have Governments of the Left. Spain is at this moment being invaded by Italian and German forces, with the more or less indirect connivance of the British 'National' Government, to encompass the overthrow of a Government of the Left. Australia and Canada have also Governments that incline in this direction. The Governments of New Zealand and Mexico are Socialist, while the political alignment of the United States under President Roosevelt has been as much to the Left as a sabotaging Supreme Court would allow. In short, there are few countries in Europe

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in which there is not either a Left majority or a very strong minority. This applies even to the dictator countries. In Germany and in Italy the people are inarticulate, ground down under the iron heel of a barbaric Fascism.

The rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany was due to the realization by the capitalists of both countries that they could not arrest the progress of Socialist transformation within the framework of democracy. They saw that if democracy survived, Socialism was ultimately inevitable. The capitalist States of Europe have either to fight democracy or submit to transformation by it. It is this fear of a Socialist victory that inspires the foreign policy of the 'National' Government. It accounts for their ideological affiliation with Germany and Italy. In these countries for the time being Capitalism survives and its only considerable threat, at present hidden, comes from the Socialists.

No one can tell exactly the strength of the anti-Fascist forces inside Germany and Italy. All that is known is that it is as significant as it is silent. But still waters run deep. There is mounting up behind the barriers a flood which may sooner or later burst through, and Mussolini and Hitler will be overwhelmed and become as driftwood in a surging cataract.

It is significant that most of the dictators in Europe began on the extreme Left. Mussolini might be said to have been a Socialist by heredity and environment. His father was a notorious Socialist; the infant Mussolini toddled to the Socialist meeting. As a Socialist agitator in Italy and Switzerland, he was arrested and jailed eleven times. In 1909 he founded his own paper, *La Lotta di Classi* ('The Class Struggle') which made him well known among Socialists and revolutionaries throughout Italy. In 1912 he became Editor of the *Avanti*, the official Socialist daily, and so brilliant and successful was his journalism that he trebled its circulation in three months. After the War, Mussolini, still a Socialist, though not a member of the Party, founded his first *Fasci di Combattimento* with a programme definitely Left. The people of Italy at that time were in a revolutionary temper. A revolutionary programme met that mood and so Mussolini won power.

The course of the German dictator, making due allowance

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for the difference in temperament between the two peoples, was approximately analogous. Hitler became a member of a Socialist Party while still in the army. One day, hearing Feder, a Socialist agitator, making a speech, he was so impressed with the violent economic theories expressed, that he joined the German Workers' Party, an organization of Left extremists.

It is Hitler's boast that he achieved power in Germany, not by force of arms, but by the 'democratic will of the people.' The claim is justified. As Germany was still a democratic country Hitler had to have a success at the polls, to win over the electorate to his support. The internal condition of Germany since the collapse of 1931 was desperate. Professor Arnold Toynbee has said :

'To a foreign observer, who visited Germany at this date, it was a strange and awful spectacle to see a whole nation—and this one of the greatest and most civilized nations in the world—wrestling heroically against fate, yet half paralysed in its titanic struggle by the conviction that all the time its feet are irrevocably set upon the paths of destruction.'<sup>1</sup>

In the winter before, the number of registered unemployed rose to 4,980,000. Many thousands of workmen were working ten hours a day for a wage of 3d. an hour. Large numbers of Germans had not eaten meat for two years. The breakdown of economic life was so complete, and the Leftward march of the working class so determined and definite, that it threatened the survival of the Capitalist system. The Capitalists were therefore driven to realize the need for a central co-ordinating authority to conserve and preserve their interests. Something had to be done to stop the trend towards Socialism. Hence the Capitalists of Germany in 1932, faced with a revolutionary working class that threatened their power, turned to Fascism. Big Business, with appropriate alliances with the Army and the aristocracy, backed the Brownshirts of Hitler in return for services to be rendered. These were the crushing of all organized working-class movements in Germany. Thus the Nazism that destroyed

<sup>1</sup> *Review of International Affairs.*

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democracy in Germany, as also the Fascism that overwhelmed the Italian Socialists, was a counter-revolutionary movement.

Hitler's choice therefore of the name of his party was an inspiration: 'The National Socialist German Workers' Party. 'National,' 'Socialist,' 'German,' 'Workers'—he got them all in on the bill. His programme was sprinkled with Socialist catchwords, like currants in a cake. Twenty-five points there were in the famous Nazi programme and all embodied a Socialistic slogan.

It must be remembered that at this time there was a definite *rapprochement* between the Nazis and the Communists. Not only was Hitler's programme distinctly Communistic but the Left Wing of the Nazi Party was definitely Communist.

The General Election of 1933 may be said to have been the last reasonably fair election in Germany. The result of the election was startlingly significant. Although it was held just after the faked Reichstag fire, in the midst of flaming pro-Hitler propaganda, the Nazi leader only polled 37 per cent of the votes, while the total Marxist vote (Communist and Socialist) was 11,845,000.

The 'National' Government has lost the moral leadership of the world which Britain had won during the years the Labour Government held office. The way to world peace lies in the rebuilding of the Collective System in 'A New Start with the League.' By the coming of a Labour Government in Britain, the common people of all nations would get a new hope. A wave of enthusiasm for peace, for freedom, and for democracy would sweep across the world. Great Britain, as the leader of a strong group of democratic and Socialist states within the League, would soon win back the initiative in world affairs which the 'National' Government has allowed the Fascist powers to capture.

Meanwhile the people are marching on. In 1900 there were but two Socialists in the House of Commons, and only 62,000 people voted Labour at the General Election. From that beginning the Labour vote has grown steadily. In six years there were twenty-nine Labour Members and the Socialist poll was increased five times over. Since then the upward march has been irresistible. Two millions! four millions! six millions! eight millions!

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It has been said that the democratic currents of history resemble successive waves ; they break for ever on the same shoal. Democracies reach a certain stage of development ; they undergo a transformation ; their leaders may join the forces of reaction ; they may adopt the form of dictatorship. Then the whole process is repeated again. Our own political history has seemed to justify the theory. From the beginning of the century, the democratic forces have advanced four times and have receded four times. Flow and ebb, forward and back, advance and retire ; so they seemed to go. But the pessimistic simile is neither apt nor adequate. The case of democracy is not so hopeless. It may yet be saved by education. If the masses must have leaders, an educated democracy will make its choice with discriminative understanding. It will choose a real aristocracy of moral worth and technical efficiency. An educated democracy will be less apt to be swayed by sentiment and emotion, less liable to be stampeded by fear, less likely to be tricked by treachery. The people have been betrayed in the past, but 'the schoolmaster is abroad,' and history may not repeat itself.

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